WEIRD TERROR TALES

Fall No. 3

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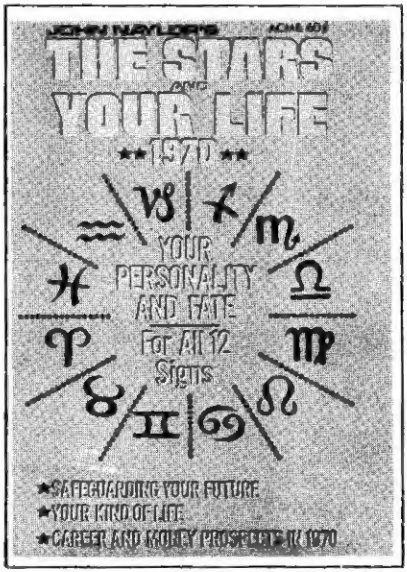

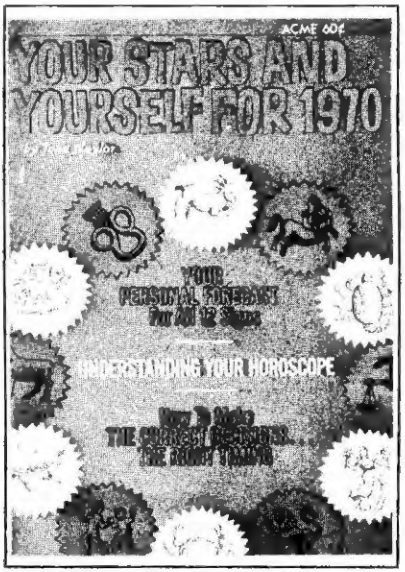

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WEIRD TERROR TALES

Volume 1 *Number 3*

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

As a child, I was brought up in the Protestant religion, and learned therein two things about the universe: (a) the universe didn't just happen, it was created according to a plan (b) there are two aspects to the universe: the physical, material aspect which we can become aware of through our senses, and the moral aspect, which we can discern but not actually see. Then, on top of this fundamental simplicity came the complexities of superstitions, folklore, mythology, etc., which managed to get tangled up with religion. And in relation to the moral aspect of the universe, I was taught that there is good and there is evil, and both have consequences which cannot be escaped; the consequences of good are rewarding and eventually pleasant, while the consequences of evil are punishing and eventually unpleasant.

Now here was the basis of terror, for the implications of all this were that whether someone (some other human being) saw me, or otherwise detected me, when I did wrong, something else – *something I myself could not see or discern* – saw, and recorded, and did not forget (as elder or other people might); and the consequences were going to work themselves out inevitably and irrevocably, either to my pleasure or displeasure. And it was further implied that the unpleasant consequences would be expressed in physical terms of pain, discomfort, fear, loss, etc.

For behind what we called nature and the natural laws, there was a supernatural order (*super* means "above" and can be used either in the sense of physical height, or in the sense of priority); and this was manifested in phenomena and events which, at times, seemed to suspend or overthrow natural laws. Of course, there were many aspects of natural law which could not be seen by the physical senses, unaided; but the supernatural was invisible . . . .

Except that certain manifestations of it could appear as fearful phenomena or terrifying events. Here entered superstition and pre-Christian or non-Christian myths, many aspects of them carrying over into the religion I was taught, in some way. Evil was accounted for in two ways (a) the disorderly, wicked desires of people and the consequences that followed their being put into action (b) the machinations of non-human intelligent beings which were hostile both to man and God. When the children of Israel were taken into Babylonian captivity, they were exposed to the Persian theology which was a very sophisticated one, and which depicted two powers, rather than one power, behind the visible universe. There was the good God and the evil God in eternal conflict with each other, and equal in power; man was often no more than a pawn in the game, for the good God could not always protect his adherents from the machinations of the evil God.

Out of this rose the ideas of Satan (the Devil), and his adherents; and although the Christian theologians taught that the Devil was not an equal to God in the dualistic Persian sense, Satan was still more powerful than human beings, as he was an evil member of a race of beings (angels) which were superior to man. Unfortunately, the Persian sense of the Devil was very strongly hinted at in various parts of the Hebrew scriptures, and Christians who

have believed in the Devil as a real being, accompanied by a host of malignant beings of varying order of intelligence and power, have tended to look upon Satan in the dualistic, Persian sense.

And it is from the Persian type of theology (or "pagan" pantheons) that come the fundamental notions of demons, witches (in the satanic sense, as defined by the Church, which never recognized witchcraft as a religion with as high a potential for good as for evil), werewolves, vampires, malignant spirits which could take possession of a person and force him to evil behavior, etc.

Up to very recently, as human history goes, this has been the background for the weird terror tale.

The Enlightenment, as we call the philosophic surge in the eighteenth century, undermined the foundations of this view of the universe; and while many of the *philosophs* were themselves Deists, their works destroyed the basis for any *source* of order in the universe. The logical conclusion could only be that the universe just happened; man just sort of came about, and is in no way protected or guided by anything outside of himself. This dispensed with both the good God and the evil God in the Persian sense; as well as any moral order in the universe itself.

It would seem that not only all foundation for the supernatural tale had been destroyed, but also all foundation for the weird terror tale.

Not so. The Christian cosmology portrays a universe friendly to man, because the God who created it loves man; the Enlightenment postulates an orderly but indifferent universe, neither friendly nor inimical; but there is still one more possibility: a hostile universe, in the sense that it is not only meaningless but at the root, chaotic.

Such is the universe portrayed in the Cthulhu Mythos stories by H. P.

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Lovecraft, and picked up by many others. The universe is a vast chaos, wherein there may be *seeming* oases of order and stability; it is filled with beings other than man who are either hostile to man or indifferent to him, and various of these beings are in conflict with each other. Earth is a battleground in a cosmic conflict and human beings are little more than pawns in the game.

It comes out the same way as the myths of the Devil and his demon, etc., followers did in Methodist Sunday School: *something we cannot see is behaving in a manner hostile to us, which can and well may destroy us.* For while Cthulhu and the others do have physical manifestations which are visible, they are not only far more powerful than man, but the greater bulk of their activities are invisible and hardly comprehensible — and implacable. The Christian God (for all the ferocious qualities attributed to him in the mish-mash of the Old Testament) *loves* man: therefore, whoever is with God will come out all right in the end, and the death of the body is not the end. But the security that one can find in being on the side of Cthulhu & Company (or their opponents) is tantamount to being on the side of the Nazis or Communists: one *may* get along very well; but one may as easily be sacrificed either to the personal whims of a party boss or superior, or to what is considered the needs of the revolution at the moment; and death is the absolute end.

Here, then, is the basis of the new terror tale, and while this particular New Wave began some time back, we can certainly hail Howard Phillips Lovecraft as its prophet. For HPL, as his correspondence over the course of the years indicates, apparently believed not specifically in Cthulhu & Company but in the sort of universe where such horrors and the terror that accompanies them is possible, even if not too likely.

We have to suspend disbelief for both Old Wave and New Wave weird terror tales, but it is easier to suspend disbelief in the Lovecraft New Wave type. This is partly because Einsteinian physics and non-Euclidean geometries play a large part in the background of them, and partly because what has happened in history during the twentieth century makes it all too easy for the average person to believe that man has no friend in the universe outside of himself and his own arrangements for protection, security, etc. Nor is it too far a leap from the facts of scientific tyrannies making human beings into puppets, objects, to super-human entities (entirely beyond our comprehension in many ways) also brainwashing and manipulating human pawns. That secular religion known as Scientism leads logically to the robot as the ideal type of life. (After all, a robot has no emotions, no feelings, and we all know how untidy feelings are; so many people behave as if their feelings were facts about the universe, or about other people, instead of facts about themselves only. Most unscientific!)

Arkham House has published a delightful volume, *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* by H. P. Lovecraft and Others, which contains the keynote story: *The Call of Cthulhu*, by H.P. Lovecraft (and one other by HPL himself, which we'll discuss in its proper place) and 17 others by friends and continuers.

Clark Ashton Smith made use of certain aspects of the material, in his own way; we see him here with *The Return of the Sorcerer* and *Ubbo-Sathla*, the latter being deeper in than the former.

Robert E. Howard made use of the forbidden book and the ghostly survivals aspects, and *The Black Stone* is a good example of his approach.

One of the earliest, and certainly one of the most imaginative followers (I use

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"followers" for those authors whose stories were written during HPL's lifetime, "continuers" for those whose stories were written later) is Frank Belknap Long, who did two masterly short stories and one excellent novel in the area. The two short stories, *The Hounds of Tindalos* and *The Space-Eaters* are here and they retain their vividness. Long took the scientific, rather than the magical approach shared by Smith and Howard, and his contributions are all the more effective for it.

August Derleth is both follower and continuer, and, as we know, wrote mythos stories both directly from HPL's commonplace book, letters, and other marginalia, and independently of any specific Lovecraft starting point outside his published stories. The two stories present are excellent ones, independent, and were written after HPL's death: *The Dwellers in Darkness* and *Beyond the Threshold*.

Robert Bloch was the first of what one might call the second generation enthusiasts who plunged in to the mythos (the others were already established before January 1928, when *The Call of Cthulhu* appeared in the February 1928 *WEIRD TALES* — although Clark Ashton Smith's tales did not start appearing in WT until later) and *The Shambler from the Stars* was his first mythos tale. Then we have *The Haunter of the Dark*, by H.P. Lovecraft, where HPL (who Bloch killed off in the story above) returns the compliment by doing Bloch in; and finally, we see Bloch's sequel to it, *The Shadow from the Steeple*.

Bloch is represented by one story outside of this RB-HPL-RB trilogy: the very fine short tale, *Notebook Found in a Deserted House*, which manages to produce a fresh feeling even though nearly every single element in it will have

become familiar to the reader by this time, if not before.

The Salem Horror is Henry Kuttner's very effective contribution, and I was pleased to find out that it seemed much better upon re-reading than I remembered it.

Up to this point, we have what might be called traditional Mythos stories. While each new author added certain elements of his own, none of them were such as to change the over-all pattern or even any important section of it. Derleth and Bloch were re-writing the same story over and over – and I do not mean this in any derogatory sense. Because these two gentlemen are skillful and imaginative authors, they could do this without getting stale, and each new story would serve as an introduction to many readers.

But, of course, there was and is a limit; eventually there comes the time when all this becomes pageantry and ritual; and things like *Necronomicon* or "Cthulhu" or some other well-known Being become hieroglyphs for horror, so that the stories become more and more special effects for an "in" group. (You have to be "in" before you can understand *why* the word *Necronomicon* should cause someone in the story - and the educated reader – to quiver with fear.)

That is why, for me, the most exciting part of the book is the six new stories by contemporary admirers of HPL. Here we have new angles, and while you'll find *some* familiar elements, there will be more new than old, and the old elements will be recombined in a fresh manner.

J. Vernon Shea is the elder of the lot (born 1912), and his contribution, *The Haunter of the Graveyard,* is more marginal than the others in that, with very few changes it could have been written without any tie-in to the mythos at all – although the relationship to HPL's *Statement of Randolph Carter* would remain. Nonetheless, very good.

J. Ramsey Campbell (born 1946) explores the degenerate cult aspect of the mythos in *Cold Print,* and adds another esoteric book, the *Revelations of Glaaki* to the canon; this is a first class horror tale, and while it deals with minor aspects of the mythos, I would say that it belongs to it.

Brian Lumley (1937) amalgamates Dunsanyian HPL with mythos HPL in *The Sister City,* drawing upon *The Doom that came to Sarnath;* and his *Cement Surroundings* is a chiller.

James Wade (1930) writes a story that could have appeared in a science fiction magazine and belonged there (as was the case with Lovecraft's *Color out of Space, At the Mountains of Madness* and *Shadow out of Time): The Deep Ones;* here we find a truly sinister connection between dolphins and our well-known horrors.

And, for me, the best is saved for last, Colin Wilson's *The Return of the Lloigor.* Mr. Wilson is a man of impressively broad erudition, like Lovecraft himself, with the knack of using a tremendous range of it convincingly in a single story. His novel, *The Mind Parasites* was a true thriller and is not to be missed, despite flaws which he has acknowledged himself, and is worth the $4.00 that Arkham House asks for in its edition. (If permanancy is less important to you, or price a consideration, there is a soft cover edition which may still be available.) The present tale shows that the novel was not a flash in the pan, or that the author had used up all he had to offer in one story.

Here, then, is the terror tale in one of its most vivid twentieth century incarnations and I recommend *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* without caveat or hesitation. RAWL

STRAGELLA

byHugh B. Cave

HUGH B. CAVE was a very popular pulpeteer of the '30s, specializing in mystery, detective, and weird fiction. He was first seen in our part of the forest with a different approach to the vampire story, *The Brotherhood of Blood*, which appeared in the May 1932 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, and had an excellent symbolic cover by C. C. Senf—who was very good when he was good! Concurrently, this present story was on the newsstands in *STRANGE TALES* and also copped a cover- this one by H. W. Wesso, a good job but nowhere near as effective as Senf's.

NIGHT, BLACK AS PITCH and filled with the wailing of a dead wind. sank like a shapeless specter into the oily waters of the Indian Ocean, leaving a great gray expanse of sullen sea, empty except for a solitary speck that rose and dropped in the long swell.

The forlorn thing was a ship's boat. For seven days and seven nights it had drifted through the waste, bearing its ghastly burden. Now, groping to his knees, one of the two survivors peered away into the East, where the first glare of a red sun filtered over the rim of the world.

Within arm's reach, in the bottom of the boat, lay a second figure, face down. All night long he had lain there. Even the torrential shower, descending in the dark hours and flooding the dory with life-giving water, had failed to move him.

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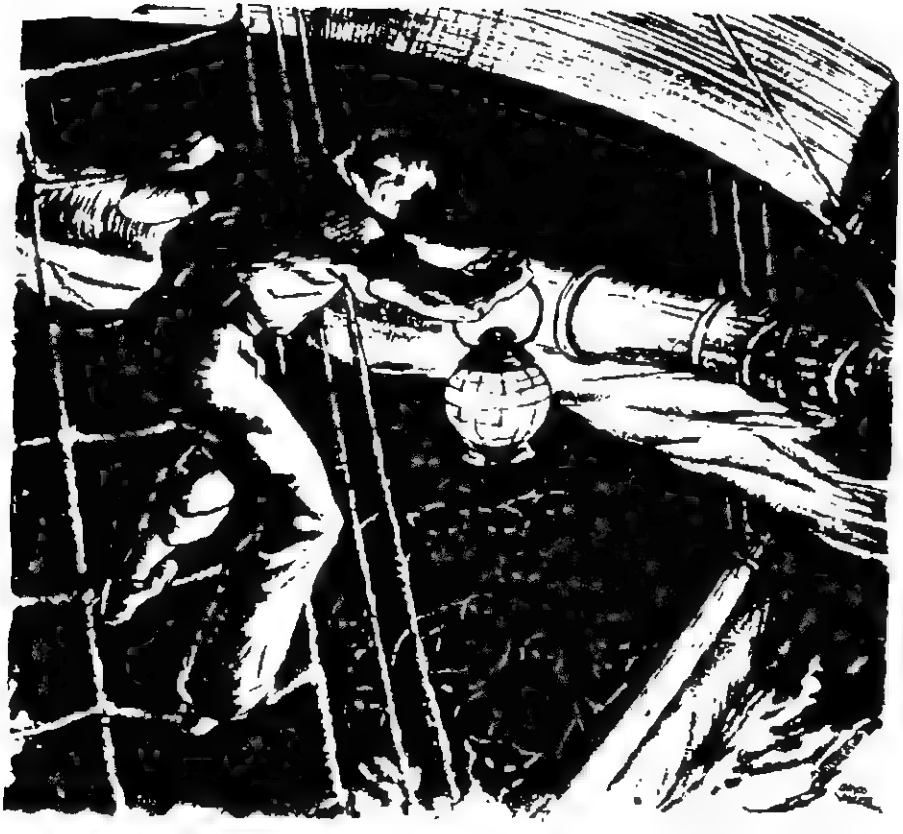

The first man crawled forward. Scooping water out of the tarpaulin with a battered tin cup, he turned his companion over and forced the stuff through receded lips.

"Miggs!" The voice was a cracked whisper. "Miggs! Good God, you ain't dead, Miggs? I ain't left all alone out here–"

John Miggs opened his eyes feebly. "What–what's wrong?" he muttered.

"We got water, Miggs! Water!"

"You're dreaming again, Yancy. It–it ain't water. It's nothin' but sea–"

"It rained!" Yancy screeched. "Last night it rained. I stretched the tarpaulin. All night long I been lyin' face up, lettin' it rain in my mouth!"

Miggs touched the tin cup to his tongue and lapped its contents suspiciously. With a mumbled cry he gulped the water down. Then, gibbering like a monkey, he was crawling toward the tarpaulin.

Yancy flung him back, snarling, "No you won't! We got to save it, see? We got to get out of here."

Miggs glowered at him from the opposite end of the dory. Yancy sprawled down beside the tarpaulin and stared once again over the abandoned sea, struggling to reason things out.

They were somewhere in the Bay of Bengal. A week ago they had been on board the *Cardigan*, a tiny tramp freighter carrying its handful of passengers from Maulmain to Georgetown. The *Cardigan* had foundered in the typhoon off the Mergui Archipelago. For twelve hours she had heaved and groaned through an inferno of swirling seas. Then she had gone under.

Yancy's memory of the succeeding events was a twisted, unreal parade of horrors. At first there had been five men in the little boat. Four days of terrific heat, no water, no food, had driven the little Persian priest mad; and he had jumped overboard. The other two had drunk salt water and died in agony. Now he and Miggs were alone.

The sun was incandescent in a white hot sky. The sea was calm, greasy, unbroken except for the slow, patient black fins that had been following the boat for days. But something else, during the night, had joined the sharks in their hellish pursuit. Sea snakes, hydrophiinae, wriggling out of nowhere, had come to haunt the dory, gliding in circles round and round, venomous, vivid, vindictive. And overhead were gulls wheeling, swooping in erratic arcs, cackling fiendishly and watching the two men with relentless eyes.

Yancy glanced up at them. Gulls and snakes could mean only one thing -land! He supposed they had come from the Andamans, the prison isles of India. It didn't much matter. They were here. Hideous, menacing harbingers of hope!

His shirt, filthy and ragged, hung open to the belt, revealing a lean chest tattooed with grotesque figures. A long time ago -too long to remember -he had gone on a drunken binge in Goa. Japanese rum had done it. In company with two others of the *Cardigan's* crew he had shambled into a tattooing establishment and ordered the proprietor, in a bloated voice, to "paint anything you damned well like, professor. Anything at all!" And the Japanese . being of a religious mind and sentimental, had decorated Yancy's chest with a most beautiful Crucifix, large, ornate, and colorful.

It brought a grim smile to Yancy's lips as he peered down at it. But presently his attention was centered on something else -something unnatural, bewildering, on the horizon. The thing was a narrow bank of fog lying low on the water, as if a distorted cloud had sunk out of the sky and was floating heavily, half submerged in the sea. And the small boat was drifting toward it.

In a little while the fog bank hung dense on all sides. Yancy groped to his feet, gazing about him. John Miggs muttered something beneath his breath and crossed himself.

The thing was shapeless, grayish-white, clammy. It reeked—not with the dank smell of sea fog, but with the sickly, pungent stench of a buried jungle or a subterranean mushroom cellar. The sun seemed unable to penetrate it. Yancy could see the red ball above him, a feeble, smothered eye of crimson fire, blotted by swirling vapor.

"The gulls," mumbled Miggs. "They're gone."

"I know it. The sharks, too—and the snakes. We're all alone, Miggs."

An eternity passed, while the dory drifted deeper and deeper into the cone. And then there was something else—something that came like a moaning voice out of the fog. The muted, irregular, sing-song clangor of a ship's bell!

"Listen!" Miggs cackled. "You hear "

But Yancy's trembling arm had come up abruptly, pointing ahead. "By God, Miggs! Look!"

Miggs scrambled up, rocking the boat beneath him. His bony

fingers gripped Yancy's arm. They stood there, the two of them, staring at the massive black shape that loomed up, like an ethereal phantom of another world, a hundred feet before them.

"We're saved," Miggs said incoherently. "Thank God, Nels—"

Yancy called out shrilly. His voice rang through the fog with a hoarse jangle, like the scream of a caged tiger. It choked into silence. And there was no answer, no responsive outcry—nothing so much as a whisper.

2

THE DORY DRIFTED CLOSER. No sound came from the lips of the two men as they drew alongside. There was nothing—nothing but the intermittent tolling of that mysterious, muted bell.

Then they realized the truth—a truth that brought a moan from Miggs' lips. The thing was a derelict, frowning out of the water, inanimate, sullen, buried in its winding-sheet of unearthly fog. Its stern was high, exposing a propeller red with rust and matted with clinging weeds. Across the bow, nearly obliterated by age, appeared the words: *Golconda—Cardiff.*

"Yancy, it ain't no real ship! It ain't of this world—"

Yancy stooped with a snarl, and picked up the oar in the bottom of the dory. A rope dangled within reach, hanging like a black serpent over the scarred hull. With clumsy strokes he drove the small boat beneath it; then, reaching up, he seized the line and made the boat fast.

"You're—goin' aboard?" Miggs said fearfully.

Yancy hesitated, staring up with bleary eyes. He was afraid, without knowing why. The *Golconda* frightened him. The mist clung to her tenaciously. She rolled heavily, ponderously in the long swell; and the bell was still tolling softly somewhere within the lost vessel.

"Well, why not?" Yancy growled. "There may be food aboard. What's there to be afraid of?"

Miggs was silent. Grasping the ropes, Yancy clambered up them. His body swung like a gibbet-corpse against the side.

Clutching the rail, he heaved himself over; then stood there, peering into the layers of thick fog, as Miggs climbed up and dropped down beside him.

"I–don't like it," Miggs whispered. "It ain't "

Yancy groped forward. The deck planks creaked dismally under him. With Miggs clinging close, he led the way into the waist, then into the bow. The cold fog seemed to have accumulated here in a sluggish mass, as if some magnetic force had drawn it. Through it, with arms outheld in front of him, Yancy moved with shuffling steps, a blind man in a strange world.

Suddenly he stopped–stopped so abruptly that Miggs lurched headlong into him. Yancy's body stiffened. His eyes were wide, glaring at the deck before him. A hollow, unintelligible sound parted his lips.

Miggs cringed back with a livid screech, clawing at his shoulder. "What–what is it?"

At their feet were bones. Skeletons–lying there in the swirl of vapor. Yancy shuddered as he examined them. Dead things they were, dead and harmless, yet they were given new life by the motion of the mist. They seemed to crawl, to wriggle, to slither toward him and away from him.

He recognized some of them as portions of human frames. Others were weird, unshapely things. A tiger skull grinned up at him with jaws that seemed to widen hungrily. The vertebrae of a huge python lay in disjointed coils on the planks, twisted as if in agony. He discerned the skeletonic remains of tigers, tapirs, and jungle beasts of unknown identity. And human heads, many of them, scattered about like an assembly of mocking, dead-alive faces, leering at him, watching him with hellish anticipation. The place was a morgue–a charnel house!

Yancy fell back, stumbling. His terror had returned with triple intensity. He felt cold perspiration forming on his forehead, on his chest, trickling down the tattooed Crucifix.

Frantically he swung about in his tracks and made for the welcome solitude of the stern deck, only to have Miggs clutch

feverishly at his arm. "I'm goin' to get out of here, Nels! That damned bell—these here things—"

Yancy flung the groping hands away. He tried to control his terror. This ship—this *Golconda*—was nothing but a tramp trader. She'd been carrying a cargo of jungle animals for some expedition. The beasts had got loose, gone amuck, in a storm. There was nothing fantastic about it!

In answer, came the intermittent clang of the hidden bell below decks and the soft lapping sound of the water swishing through the thick weeds which clung to the ship's bottom.

"Come on," Yancy said grimly. "I'm goin' to have a look around. We need food."

He strode back through the waist of the ship, with Miggs shuffling behind. Feeling his way to the towering stern, he found the fog thinner, less pungent.

The hatch leading down into the stern hold was open. It hung before his face like an uplifted hand, scarred, bloated, as if in mute warning. And out of the aperture at its base straggled a spidery thing that was strangely out of place here on this abandoned derelict a curious, menacing, crawling vine with mottled triangular leaves and immense orange-hued blossoms. Like a living snake, intertwined about itself, it coiled out of the hold and wormed over the deck.

Yancy stepped closer, hesitantly. Bending down, he reached to grasp one of the blooms, only to turn his face away and fall back with an involuntary mutter. The flowers were sickly sweet, nauseating. They repelled him with their savage odor.

"Somethin'—" Miggs whispered sibilantly, "is watchin' us, Nels! I can feel it!"

Yancy peered all about him. He, too, felt a third presence close at hand. Something malignant, evil, unearthly. He could not name it. "It's your imagination," he snapped. "Shut up, will you?"

"We ain't alone, Nels. This ain't no ship at all!"

"Shut *up!*"

"But the flowers there—they ain't right. Flowers don't grow aboard a Christian ship, Nels!"

"This hulk's been here long enough for trees to grow on it," Yancy said curtly. "The seeds probably took root in the filth below."

"Well, I don't like it."

"Go forward and see what you can find. I'm goin' below to look around."

Miggs shrugged helplessly and moved away. Alone, Yancy descended to the lower levels. It was dark down here, full of shadows and huge gaunt forms that lost their substance in the coils of thick, sinuous fog. He felt his way along the passage, pawing the wall with both hands. Deeper and deeper into the labyrinth he went, until he found the galley.

The galley was a dungeon, reeking of dead, decayed food, as if the stench had hung there for an eternity without being molested; as if the entire ship lay in an atmosphere of its own—an atmosphere of the grave—through which the clean outer air never broke.

But there was food here; canned food that stared down at him from the rotted shelves. The labels were blurred, illegible. Some of the cans crumbled in Yancy's fingers as he seized them—disintegrated into brown, dry dust and trickled to the floor. Others were in fair condition, air-tight. He stuffed four of them into his pockets and turned away.

Eagerly now, he stumbled back along the passage. The prospects of food took some of those other thoughts out of his mind, and he was in better humor when he finally found the captain's cabin.

Here, too, the evident age of the place gripped him. The walls were gray with mold, falling into a broken, warped floor. A single table stood on the far side near the bunk, a blackened, grimy table bearing an upright oil lamp and a single black book.

He picked the lamp up timidly and shook it. The circular base was yet half full of oil, and he set it down carefully. It would come in handy later. Frowning, he peered at the book beside it.

It was a seaman's Bible, a small one, lying there, coated with cracked dust, dismal with age. Around it, as if some crawling slug

had examined it on all sides, leaving a trail of excretion, lay a peculiar line of black pitch, irregular but unbroken.

3

YANCY PICKED THE BOOK UP and flipped it open. The pages slid under his fingers, allowing a scrap of loose paper to flutter to the floor. He stooped to retrieve it; then, seeing that it bore a line of penciled script, he peered closely at it.

The writing was an apparently irrelevant scrawl—a meaningless memorandum which said crudely: *"It's the bats and the crates. I know it now, but it is too late. God help me!"*

With a shrug, he replaced it and thrust the Bible into his belt, where it pressed comfortingly against his body. Then he continued his exploration.

In the wall cupboard, he found two full bottles of liquor, which proved to be brandy. Leaving them there, he groped out of the cabin and returned to the upper deck in search of Miggs.

Miggs was leaning on the rail, watching something below. Yancy trudged toward him, calling out shrilly: "Say, I got food, Miggs! Food and brand—"

He did not finish. Mechanically his eyes followed the direction of Miggs' stare, and he recoiled involuntarily as his words clipped into stifled silence. On the surface of the oily water below, huge sea snakes paddled against the ship's side--enormous slithering shapes, banded with streaks of black and red and yellow, vicious and repulsive.

"They're back," Miggs said quickly. "They know this ain't no proper ship. They come here out of their hellhole, to wait for us."

Yancy glanced at him curiously. The inflection of Miggs' voice was peculiar—not at all the phlegmatic, guttural tone that usually grumbled through the little man's lips. It was almost eager!

"What did you find?" Yancy faltered.

"Nothin'. All the ship's boats are hangin' in their davits. Never been touched."

"I found food," Yancy said abruptly, gripping his arm. "We'll

eat; then we'll feel better. What the hell are we, anyhow—a couple of fools? Soon as we eat, we'll stock the dory and get off this blasted death ship and clear out of this stinkin' fog. We got water in the tarpaulin."

"We'll clear out? Will we, Nels?"

"Yah. Let's eat."

Once again, Yancy led the way below decks to the galley. There, after a twenty-minute effort in building a fire in the rusty stove, he and Miggs prepared a meal, carrying the food into the captain's cabin, where Yancy lighted the lamp.

They ate slowly, sucking the taste hungrily out of every mouthful, reluctant to finish. The lamplight, flickering in their faces, made gaunt masks of features that were already haggard and full of anticipation.

The brandy, which Yancy fetched out of the cupboard, brought back strength and reason—and confidence. It brought back, too, that unnatural sheen to Miggs' twitching eyes.

"We'd be damned fools to clear out of here right off," Miggs said suddenly. "The fog's got to lift sooner or later. I ain't trustin' myself to no small boat again, Nels—not when we don't know where we're at."

Yancy looked at him sharply. The little men turned away with a guilty shrug. Then hesitantly: "I—I kinda like it here, Nels."

Yancy caught the odd gleam in those small eyes. He bent forward quickly. "Where'd you go when I left you alone?"

"Me? I didn't go nowhere. I—I just looked around a bit, and I picked a couple of them flowers. See."

Miggs groped in his shirt pocket and held up one of the livid, orange-colored blooms. His face took on an unholy brilliance as he held the thing close to his lips and inhaled its deadly aroma. His eyes, glittering across the table, were on fire with sudden fanatic lust.

For an instant Yancy did not move. Then, with a savage oath, he lurched up and snatched the flower out of Miggs' fingers. Whirling, he flung it to the floor and ground it under his boot.

"You damned thick-headed fool!" he screeched. "You— God help you!"

Then he went limp, muttering incoherently. With faltering steps he stumbled out of the cabin and along the black passageway, and up on the abandoned deck. He staggered to the rail and stood there, holding himself erect with nerveless hands.

"God!" he whispered hoarsely. "God—what did I do that for? Am I goin' crazy?"

No answer came out of the silence. But he knew the answer. The thing he had done down there in the skipper's cabin -those mad words that had spewed from his mouth — had been involuntary. Something inside him, some sense of danger that was all about him, had hurled the words out of his mouth before he could control them. And his nerves were on edge, too; they felt as though they were ready to crack.

But he knew instinctively that Miggs had made a terrible mistake. There was something unearthly and wicked about those sickly sweet flowers. Flowers didn't grow aboard ship. Not real flowers. Real flowers had to take root somewhere, and, besides, they didn't have that drunken, etherish odor. Miggs should have left the vine alone. Clinging at the rail there, Yancy *knew* it, without knowing why.

He stayed there for a long time, trying to think and get his nerves back again. In a little while he began to feel frightened, being alone, and he returned below-decks to the cabin.

He stopped in the doorway, and stared.

Miggs was still there, slumped grotesquely over the table. The bottle was empty. Miggs was drunk, unconscious, mercifully oblivious of his surroundings.

For a moment Yancy glared at him morosely. For a moment, too, a new fear tugged at Yancy's heart—fear of being left alone through the coming night. He yanked Miggs' arm and shook him savagely; but there was no response. It would be hours, long, dreary, sinister hours, before Miggs regained his senses.

Bitterly Yancy took the lamp and set about exploring the rest of the ship. If he could find the ship's papers, he considered, they might dispel his terror. He might learn the truth.

With this in mind, he sought the mate's quarters. The papers

had not been in the captain's cabin where they belonged; therefore they might be here.

But they were not. There was nothing—nothing but a chronometer, sextant, and other nautical instruments lying in curious positions on the mate's table, rusted beyond repair. And there were flags, signal flags, thrown down as if they had been used at the last moment. And, lying in a distorted heap on the floor, was a human skeleton.

Avoiding this last horror, Yancy searched the room thoroughly. Evidently, he reasoned, the captain had died early in the *Golconda's* unknown plague. The mate had brought these instruments, these flags, to his own cabin, only to succumb before he could use them.

Only one thing Yancy took with him when he went out: a lantern, rusty and brittle, but still serviceable. It was empty, but he poured oil into it from the lamp. Then, returning the lamp to the captain's quarters where Miggs lay unconscious, he went on deck.

He climbed the bridge and set the lantern beside him. Night was coming. Already the fog was lifting, allowing darkness to creep in beneath it. And so Yancy stood there, alone and helpless, while blackness settled with uncanny quickness over the entire ship.

He was being watched. He felt it. Invisible eyes, hungry and menacing, were keeping check on his movements. On the deck beneath him were those inexplicable flowers, trailing out of the unexplored hold, glowing like phosphorescent faces in the gloom.

"By God," Yancy mumbled, "I'm goin' to get out of here!"

His own voice startled him and caused him to stiffen and peer about him, as if someone else had uttered the words. And then, very suddenly, his eyes became fixed on the far horizon to starboard. His lips twitched open, spitting out a shrill cry.

"Miggs! Miggs! A light! Look, Miggs—"

Frantically he stumbled down from the bridge and clawed his way below decks to the mate's cabin. Feverishly he seized the signal flags. Then, clutching them in his hand, he moaned helplessly and let them fall. He realized that they were no good,

no good in the dark. Gibbering to himself, he searched for rockets. There were none.

Suddenly he remembered the lantern. Back again he raced through the passage, on deck, up on the bridge. In another moment, with the lantern dangling from his arm, he was clambering higher and higher into the black spars of the mainmast. Again and again he slipped and caught himself with outflung hands. And at length he stood high above the deck, feet braced, swinging the lantern back and forth . . .

4

BELOW HIM THE DECK was no longer silent, no longer abandoned. From bow to stern it was trembling, creaking, whispering up at him. He peered down fearfully. Blurred shadows seemed to be prowling through the darkness, coming out of nowhere, pacing dolefully back and forth through the gloom. They were watching him with a furtive interest.

He called out feebly. The muted echo of his own voice came back up to him. He was aware that the bell was tolling again, and the swish of the sea was louder, more persistent.

With an effort he caught a grip on himself. "Damned fool," he rasped. "Drivin' yourself crazy—"

The moon was rising. It blurred the blinking light on the horizon and penetrated the darkness like a livid yellow finger. Yancy lowered the lantern with a sob. It was no good now. In the glare of the moonlight, this puny flame would be invisible to the men aboard that other ship. Slowly, cautiously, he climbed down to the deck.

He tried to think of something to do, to take his mind off the fear. Striding to the rail, he hauled up the water butts from the dory. Then he stretched the tarpaulin to catch the precipitation of the night dew. No telling how long he and Miggs would be forced to remain aboard the hulk.

He turned, then, to explore the forecastle. On his way across the deck, he stopped and held the light over the creeping vine. The curious flowers had become fragrant, heady, with the fumes

of an intoxicating drug. He followed the coils to where they vanished into the hold, and he looked down. He saw only a tumbled pile of boxes and crates. Barred boxes which must have been cages at one time.

Again he turned away. The ship was trying to tell him something. He felt it—felt the movements of the deck planks beneath his feet. The moonlight, too, had made hideous white things of the scattered bones in the bow. Yancy stared at them with a shiver. He stared again, and grotesque thoughts obtruded into his consciousness. The bones were moving. Slithering, sliding over the deck, assembling themselves, gathering into definite shapes. He could have sworn it!

Cursing, he wrenched his eyes away. Damned fool, thinking such thoughts! With clenched fists he advanced to the forecastle; but before he reached it, he stopped again.

It was the sound of flapping wings that brought him about. Turning quickly, with a jerk, he was aware that the sound emanated from the open hold. Hesitantly he stepped forward—and stood rigid with an involuntary scream.

Out of the aperture came two horrible shapes — two inhuman things with immense, clapping wings and glittering eyes. Hideous; enormous. *Bats!*

Instinctively he flung his arm up to protect himself. But the creatures did not attack. They hung for an instant, poised over the hatch, eyeing him with something that was fiendishly like intelligence. Then they flapped over the deck, over the rail, and away into the night. As they sped away towards the west, where he had seen the light of that other ship twinkling, they clung together like witches hell-bent on some evil mission. And below them, in the bloated sea, huge snakes weaved smoky, golden patterns—waiting! . . .

He stood fast, squinting after the bats. Like two hellish black eyes they grew smaller and smaller, became pinpoints in the moon-glow, and finally vanished. Still he did not stir. His lips were dry, his body stiff and unnatural. He licked his mouth. Then he was conscious of something more. From somewhere

behind him came a thin, throbbing thread of harmony—a lovely, utterly sweet musical note that fascinated him.

He turned slowly. His heart was hammering, surging. His eyes went suddenly wide.

There, not five feet from him, stood a human form. Not his imagination. Real!

But he had never seen a girl like her before. She was too beautiful. She was wild, almost savage, with her great dark eyes boring into him. Her skin was white, smooth as alabaster. Her hair was jet black; and a waving coil of it, like a broken cobweb of pitch strings, framed her face. Grotesque hoops of gold dangled from her ears. In her hair, above them, gleamed two of those sinister flowers from the straggling vine.

He did not speak; he simply gaped. The girl was bare-footed, bare-legged. A short, dark skirt covered her slender thighs. A ragged white waist, open at the throat, revealed the full curve of her breast. In one hand she held a long wooden reed, a flute-like instrument fashioned out of crude wood. And about her middle, dangling almost to the deck, twined a scarlet, silken sash, brilliant as the sun, but not so scarlet as her lips, which were parted in a faint, suggestive smile, showing teeth of marble whiteness!

"Who -who are you?" Yancy mumbled.

She shook her head. Yet she smiled with her eyes, and he felt, somehow, that she understood him. He tried again, in such tongues as he knew. Still she shook her head, and still he felt that she was mocking him. Not until he chanced upon a scattered, faltering greeting in Serbian, did she nod her head.

"Dobra!" she replied, in a husky, rich voice which sounded, somehow, as if it were rarely used.

He stepped closer then. She was a gipsy evidently. A Tzany of the Serbian hills. She moved very close to him with a floating, almost ethereal movement of her slender body. Peering into his face, flashing her haunting smile at him, she lifted the flute-like instrument and, as if it were nothing at all unnatural or out of place, began to play again the song which had first attracted his attention.

He listened in silence until she had finished. Then, with a

cunning smile, she touched her fingers to her lips and whispered softly: "You—mine. Yes?"

He did not understand. She clutched his arm and glanced fearfully toward the west, out over the sea. "You mine!" she said again, fiercely. "Papa Bocito—Seraphino—they no have you. You—not go—to them!"

He thought he understood then. She turned away from him and went silently across the deck. He watched her disappear into the forecastle, and would have followed her, but once again the ship—the whole ship seemed to be struggling to whisper a warning.

Presently she returned, holding in her white hand a battered silver goblet, very old and very tarnished, brimming with scarlet fluid. He took it silently. It was impossible to refuse her. Her eyes had grown into lakes of night, lit by the burning moon. Her lips were soft, searching, undeniable.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"Stragella," she smiled.

"Stragella . . . Stragella . . ."

The name itself was compelling. He drank the liquid slowly, without taking his eyes from her lovely face. The stuff had the taste of wine—strong, sweet wine. It was intoxicating, with the same weird effect that was contained in the orange blooms which she wore in her hair and which groveled over the deck behind her.

Yancy's hands groped up weakly. He rubbed his eyes, feeling suddenly weak, powerless, as if the very blood had been drained from his veins. Struggling futilely, he staggered back, moaning half inaudibly.

Stragella's arms went about him, caressing him with sensuous touch. He felt them, and they were powerful, irresistible. The girl's smile maddened him. Her crimson lips hung before his face, drawing nearer, mocking him. Then, all at once, she was seeking his throat. Those warm, passionate, deliriously pleasant lips were searching to touch him.

He sensed his danger. Frantically he strove to lift his arms and push her away. Deep in his mind some struggling intuition, some

half-alive idea, warned him that he was in terrible peril. This girl, Stragella, was not of his kind; she was a creature of the darkness, a denizen of a different, frightful world of her own! Those lips, wanting his flesh, were inhuman, too fervid—

Suddenly she shrank away from him, releasing him with a jerk. A snarling animal-like sound surged through her flaming mouth. Her hand lashed out, rigid, pointing to the thing that hung in his belt. Talonic fingers pointed to the Bible that defied her!

But the scarlet fluid had taken its full effect. Yancy slumped down, unable to cry out. In a heap he lay there, paralyzed, powerless to stir.

He knew that she was commanding him to rise. Her lips, moving in pantomime, formed soundless words. Her glittering eyes were fixed upon him, hypnotic. The Bible—she wanted him to cast it over the rail! She wanted him to stand up and go into her arms. Then her lips would find a hold . . .

But he could not obey. He could not raise his arms to support himself. She, in turn, stood at bay and refused to advance. Then, whirling about, her lips drawn into a diabolical curve, beautiful but bestial, she retreated. He saw her dart back, saw her tapering body whip about, with the crimson sash outflung behind her as she raced across the deck.

Yancy closed his eyes to blot out the sight. When he opened them again, they opened to a new, more intense horror. On the *Golconda's* deck, Stragella was darting erratically among those piles of gleaming bones. But they were bones no longer. They had gathered into shapes, taken on flesh, blood. Before his very eyes they assumed substance, men and beasts alike. And then began an orgy such as Nels Yancy had never before looked upon—an orgy of the undead.

Monkeys, giant apes, lunged about the deck. A huge python reared its sinuous head to glare. On the hatch cover a snow-leopard, snarling, furiously, crouched to spring. Tigers, tapirs, crocodiles—fought together in the bow. A great brown bear, of the type found in the lofty plateaus of the Pamirs, clawed at the rail.

And the men! Most of them were dark-skinned—dark enough

to have come from the same region. from Madras. With them crouched Chinamen, and some Anglo-Saxons. Starved, all of them. Lean, gaunt, mad!

Pandemonium raged then. Animals and men alike were insane with hunger. In a little struggling knot, the men were gathered about the number-two hatch, defending themselves. They were wielding firearms—firing pointblank with desperation into the writhing mass that confronted them. And always, between them and around them and among, darted the girl who called herself Stragella.

They cast no shadows, those ghost shapes. Not even the girl, whose arms he had felt about him only a moment ago. There was nothing real in the scene, nothing human. Even the sounds of the shots and the screams of the cornered men, even the roaring growls of the big cats, were smothered as if they came to him through heavy glass windows, from a sealed chamber.

5

HE WAS POWERLESS TO MOVE. He lay in a cataleptic condition, conscious of the entire pantomime, yet unable to flee from it. And his senses were horribly acute—so acute that he turned his eyes upward with an abrupt twitch, instinctively; and then shrank into himself with a new fear as he discerned the two huge bats which had winged their way across the sea . . .

They were returning now. Circling above him, they flapped down one after the other and settled with heavy, sullen thuds upon the hatch, close to that weird vine of flowers. They seemed to have lost their shape, these nocturnal monstrosities, to have become fantastic blurs, enveloped in an unearthly bluish radiance. Even as he stared at them, they vanished altogether for a moment; and then the strange vapor cleared to reveal the two creatures who stood there!

Not bats! Humans! Inhumans! They were gipsies, attired in moldy, decayed garments which stamped them as Balkans. Man and woman. Lean, emaciated, ancient man with fierce white mustache; plump old woman with black, rat-like eyes that

seemed unused to the light of day. And they spoke to Stragella -spoke to her eagerly. She, in turn, swung about with enraged face and pointed to the Bible in Yancy's belt.

But the pantomime was not finished. On the deck the men and animals lay moaning, sobbing. Stragella turned noiselessly, calling the old man and woman after her. Calling them by name. "Come—Papa Bocito, Seraphino!"

The tragedy of the ghost-ship was being reenacted. Yancy knew it, and shuddered at the thought. Starvation, cholera had driven the *Golconda's* crew mad. The jungle beasts, unfed, hideously savage, had escaped out of their confinement. And now—now that the final conflict was over—Stragella and Papa Bocito and Seraphino were proceeding about their ghastly work.

Stragella was leading them. Her charm, her beauty, gave her a hold on the men. They were in love with her. She had *made* them love her, madly and without reason. Now she was moving from one to another, loving them and holding them close to her. And as she stepped away from each man, he went limp, faint, while she laughed terribly and passed on to the next. Her lips were parted. She licked them hungrily -licked the blood from them with a sharp, crimson tongue.

How long it lasted, Yancy did not know. Hours, hours on end. He was aware, suddenly, that a high wind was screeching and wailing in the upper reaches of the ship; and, peering up, he saw that the spars were no longer bare and rotten with age. Great gray sails stood out against the black sky fantastic things without any definite form or outline. And the moon above them had vanished utterly. The howling wind was bringing a storm with it, filling the sails to bulging proportions. Beneath the decks the ship was groaning like a creature in agony. The seas were lashing her, slashing her, carrying her forward with amazing speed.

Of a sudden came a mighty griding sound. The *Golconda* hurtled back, as if a huge, jagged reef of submerged rock had bored into her bottom. She listed. Her stern rose high in the air. And Stragella, with her two fellow fiends, was standing in the

bow, screaming in mad laughter in the teeth of the wind. The other two laughed with her.

Yancy saw them turn toward him, but they did not stop. Somehow, he did not expect them to stop. This scene, this mad pantomime, was not the present; it was the past. He was not here at all. All this had happened years ago! Forgotten, buried in the past!

But he heard them talking, in a mongrel dialect full of Serbian words.

"It is done, Papa Bocito! We shall stay here forever now. There is land within an hour's flight, where fresh blood abounds and will always abound. And here, on this wretched hulk, they will never find our graves to destroy us!"

The horrible trio passed close. Stragella turned, to stare out across the water, and raised her hand in silent warning. Yancy, turning wearily to stare in the same direction, saw that the first streaks of daylight were beginning to filter over the sea.

With a curious floating, drifting movement the three undead creatures moved toward the open hatch. They descended out of sight. Yancy, jerking himself erect and surprised to find that the effects of the drug had worn off with the coming of dawn, crept to the hatch and peered down—in time to see those fiendish forms enter their coffins. He knew then what the crates were. In the dim light, now that he was staring directly into the aperture, he saw what he had not noticed before. Three of those oblong boxes were filled with dank grave-earth!

He knew then the secret of the unnatural flowers. They *had* roots! They were rooted in the soil which harbored those undead bodies!

Then, like a groping finger, the dawn came out of the sea. Yancy walked to the rail, dazed. It was over now -all over. The orgy was ended. The *Golconda* was once more an abandoned, rotted hulk.

For an hour he stood at the rail, sucking in the warmth and glory of the sunlight. Once again that wall of unsightly mist was rising out of the water on all sides. Presently it would bury the ship, and Yancy shuddered.

He thought of Miggs. With quick steps he paced to the companionway and descended to the lower passage. Hesitantly he prowled through the thickening layers of dank fog. A queer sense of foreboding crept over him.

He called out even before he reached the door. There was no answer. Thrusting the barrier open, he stepped across the sill—and then he stood still while a sudden harsh cry broke from his lips.

Miggs was lying there, half across the table, his amrs flung out, his head turned grotesquely on its side, staring up at the ceiling.

"Miggs! Miggs!" The sound came choking through Yancy's lips. "Oh, God, Miggs what happened?"

He reeled forward. Miggs was cold and stiff, and quite dead. All the blood was gone out of his face and arms. His eyes were glassy, wide open. He was as white as marble, shrunken horribly. In his throat were two parallel marks, as if a sharp-pointed staple had been hammered into the flesh and then withdrawn. The marks of the vampire.

For a long time Yancy did not retreat. The room swayed and lurched before him. He was alone. Alone! The whole ghastly thing was too sudden, two unexpected.

Then he stumbled forward and went down on his knees, clawing at Miggs' dangling arm. "Oh God, Miggs," he mumbled incoherently. "You got to help me. I can't stand it!"

He cling there, white-faced, staring, sobbing thickly—and presently slumped in a pitiful heap, dragging Miggs over on top of him.

6

IT WAS LATER AFTERNOON when he regained consciousness. He stood up, fighting away the fear that overwhelmed him. He had to get away, get away! The thought hammered into his head with monotonous force. Get away!

He found his way to the upper deck. There was nothing he could do for Miggs. He would have to leave him here. Stumbling, he moved along the rail and reached down to draw the small boat

closer, where he could provision it and make it ready for his departure.

His fingers clutched emptiness. The ropes were gone. The dory was gone. He hung limp, staring down at a flat expanse of oily sea.

For an hour he did not move. He fought to throw off his fear long enough to think of a way out. Then he stiffened with a sudden jerk and pushed himself away from the rail.

The ship's boats offered the only chance. He groped to the nearest one and labored feverishly over it.

But the task was hopeless. The life boats were of metal, rusted through and through, wedged in their davits. The wire cables were knotted and immovable. He tore his hands on them, wringing blood from his scarred fingers. Even while he worked, he knew that the boats would not float. They were rotten through and through.

He had to stop, at last, from exhaustion.

After that, knowing that there was no escape, he had to do something, anything, to keep sane. First he would clear those horrible bones from the deck, then explore the rest of the ship . . .

It was a repulsive task,but he drove himself to it. If he could get rid of the bones, perhaps Stragella and the other two creatures would not return. He did not know. It was merely a faint hope, something to cling to.

With grim, tight-pressed lips he dragged the bleached skeletons over the deck and kicked them over the side, and stood watching them as they sank from sight. Then he went to the hold, smothering his terror, and descended into the gloomy belly of the vessel. He avoided the crates with a shudder of revulsion. Ripping up that evil vine-thing by the roots, he carried it to the rail and flung it away, with the mold of grave-earth still clinging to it.

After that he went over the entire ship, end to end, but found nothing.

He slipped the anchor chains then, in the hopes that the ship would drift away from that vindictive bank of fog. Then he

paced back and forth, muttering to himself and trying to force courage for the most hideous task of all.

The sea was growing dark, and with dusk came increasing terror. He knew the *Golconda* was drifting. Knew, too, that the undead inhabitants of the vessel were furious with him for allowing the boat to drift away from their source of food. Or they *would* be furious when they came alive again after their interim of forced sleep.

And there was only one method of defeating them. It was a horrible method, and he was already frightened. Nevertheless he searched the deck for a marlin spike and found one; and, turning sluggishly, he went back to the hold.

A stake, driven through the heart of each of the horrible trio . . .

The rickety stairs were deep in shadow. Already the dying sun, buried behind its wreath of evil fog, was a ring of bloody mist. He glanced at it and realized that he must hurry. He cursed himself for having waited so long.

It was hard, lowering himself into the pitch-black hold when he could only feel his footing and trust to fate. His boots scraped ominously on the steps. He held his hands above him, gripping the deck timbers.

And suddenly he slipped.

His foot caught on the edge of a lower step, twisted abruptly, and pitched him forward. He cried out. The marlin spike dropped from his hand and clattered on one of the crates below. He tumbled in a heap, clawing for support. The impact knocked something out of his belt. And he realized, even as his head came in sharp contact with the foremost oblong box, that the Bible, which had heretofore protected him, was no longer a part of him.

He did not lose complete control of his senses. Frantically he sought to regain his knees and grope for the black book in the gloom of the hold. A sobbing, choking sound came pitifully from his lips.

A soft, triumphant laugh came out of the darkness close to him. He swung about heavily—so heavily that the movement sent him sprawling again in an inert heap.

He was too late. She was already there on her knees, glaring at him hungrily. A peculiar bluish glow welled about her face. She was ghastly beautiful as she reached behind her into the oblong crate and began to trace a circle about the Bible with a chunk of soft, tarry, pitch-like substance clutched in her white fingers.

Yancy stumbled toward her, finding strength in desperation. She straightened to meet him. Her lips, curled back, exposed white teeth. Her arms coiled out, enveloping him, stifling his struggles. God, they were strong. He could not resist them. The same languid, resigned feeling came over him. He would have fallen, but she held him erect.

She did not touch him with her lips. Behind her he saw two other shapes take form in the darkness. The savage features of Papa Bocito glowered at him; and Seraphino's ratty, smoldering eyes, full of hunger, bored into him. Stragella was obviously afraid of them.

Yancy was lifted from his feet. He was carried out on deck and borne swiftly, easily, down the companionway, along the lower passage, through a swirling blanket of hellish fog and darkness, to the cabin where Miggs lay dead. And he lost consciousness while they carried him.

7

HE COULD NOT TELL, when he opened his eyes, how long he had been asleep. It seemed a long, long interlude. Stragella was sitting beside him. He lay on the bunk in the cabin, and the lamp was burning on the table, revealing Miggs' limp body in full detail.

Yancy reached up fearfully to touch his throat. There were no marks there; not yet.

He was aware of voices, then. Papa Bocito and the ferret-faced woman were arguing with the girl beside him. The savage old man in particular was being angered by her cool, possessive smile.

"We are drifting away from the prison isles," Papa Bocito snarled, glancing at Yancy with unmasked hate. "It is his work,

lifting the anchor. Unless you share him with us until we drift ashore, we shall perish!"

"He is mine," Stragella shrugged, modulating her voice to a persuasive whisper. "You had the other. This one is mine. I shall have him!"

"He belongs to us all!"

"Why?" Stragella smiled. "Because he has looked upon the resurrection night? Ah, he is the first to learn our secret."

Seraphino's eyes narrowed at that, almost to pinpoints. She jerked forward, clutching the girl's shoulder.

"We have quarreled enough," she said. "Soon it will be daylight. He belongs to us all because he has taken us away from the isles and learned our secrets."

The words drilled their way into Yancy's brain. "The resurrection night!" There was an ominous significance in it, and he thought he knew its meaning. His eyes, or his face, must have revealed his thoughts, for Papa Bocito drew near to him and pointed into his face with a long, bony forefinger, muttering triumphantly.

"You have seen what no other eyes have seen," the ancient man growled bitterly. "Now, for that, you shall become one of us. Stragella wants you. She shall have you for eternity--for a life without death. Do you know what that means?"

Yancy shook his head dumbly, fearfully.

"We are the undead," Bocito leered. "Our victims become creatures of the blood, like us. At night we are free. During the day we must return to our graves. That is why"—he cast his arm toward the upper deck in a hideous gesture—"those other victims of ours have not yet become like us. They were never buried: they have no graves to return to. Each night we give them life for our own amusement, but they are not of the brotherhood—yet."

Yancy licked his lips and said nothing. He understood then. Every night it happened. A nightly pantomime, when the dead became alive again, reenacting the events of the night when the *Golconda* had become a ship of hell.

"We are gipsies," the old man gloated. "Once we were human, living in our pleasant little camp in the shadow of Pobyezdin

Potok's crusty peaks in the Morava Valley of Serbia. That was in the time of Milutin, six hundreds of years ago. Then the vampires of the hills came for us and took us to them. We lived the undead life, until there was no more blood in the valley. So we went to the coast, we three, transporting our grave-earth with us. And we lived there, alive by night and dead by day, in the coastal villages of the Black Sea, until the time came when we wished to go to the far places."

Seraphino's guttural voice interrupted him, saying harshly: "Hurry. It is nearly dawn!"

"And we obtained passage on this *Golconda*, arranging to have our crates of grave-earth carried secretly to the hold. And the ship fell into cholera and starvation and storm. She went aground. And here we are. Ah, but there is blood upon the islands, my pretty one, and so we anchored the *Golconda* on the reef, where life was close at hand!"

Yancy closed his eyes with a shudder. He did not understand all of the words; they were a jargon of gipsy tongue. But he knew enough to horrify him.

Then the old man ceased gloating. He fell back, glowering at Stragella. And the girl laughed, a mad, cackling, triumphant laugh of possession. She leaned forward, and the movement brought her out of the line of the lamplight, so that the feeble glow fell full over Yancy's prostrate body.

At that, with an angry snarl, she recoiled. Her eyes went wide with abhorrence. Upon his chest gleamed the Crucifix—the tattooed Cross and Savior which had been indelibly printed. Stragella held her face away, shielding her eyes. She cursed him horribly. Backing away, she seized the arms of her companions and pointed with trembling finger to the thing which had repulsed her.

The fog seemed to seep deeper and deeper into the cabin during the ensuing silence. Yancy struggled to a sitting posture and cringed back against the wall, waiting for them to attack him. It would be finished in a moment, he knew. Then he would join Miggs, with those awful marks on his throat and Stragella's lips crimson with his sucked blood.

But they held their distance. The fog enveloped them, made them almost indistinct. He could see only three pairs of eyes that grew larger and wider and more intensely terrible.

He buried his face in his hands, waiting. They did not come. He heard them mumbling, whispering. Vaguely he was conscious of another sound, far off and barely audible. The howl of wolves.

Beneath him the bunk was swaying from side to side with the movement of the ship. The *Golconda* was drifting swiftly. A storm had risen out of nowhere, and the wind was singing its dead dirge in the rotten spars high above decks. He could hear it moaning, wheezing, like a human being in torment.

Then the three pairs of glittering orbs moved nearer. The whispered voices ceased, and a cunning smile passed over Stragella's features. Yancy screamed, and flattened against the wall. He watched her in fascination as she crept upon him. One arm was flung across her eyes to protect them from the sight of the Crucifix. In the other hand, outstretched, groping ever nearer, she clutched that hellish chunk of pitch-like substance with which she had encircled the Bible!

He knew what she would do. The thought struck him like an icy blast, full of fear and madness. She would slink closer, closer, until her hand touched his flesh. Then she would place the black substance around the tattooed cross and kill its powers. His defense would be gone. Then—those cruel lips on his throat . . .

There was no avenue of escape. Papa Bocito and the plump old woman, grinning malignantly, had slid to one side, between him and the doorway. And Stragella writhed forward with one alabaster arm feeling . . . feeling . . .

He was conscious of the roar of surf, very close, very loud, outside the walls of the fog-filled enclosure. The ship was lurching, reeling heavily, pitching in the swell. Hours must have passed. Hours and hours of darkness and horror.

Then she touched him. The sticky stuff was hot on his chest, moving in a slow circle. He hurled himself back, stumbled, went down, and she fell upon him.

Under his tormented body the floor of the cabin split asunder. The ship buckled from top to bottom with a grinding roaring

impact. A terrific shock burst through the ancient hulk, shattering its rotted timbers.

The lamp caromed off the table, plunging the cabin in semi-darkness. Through the port-holes filtered a gray glare. Stragella's face, thrust into Yancy's, became a mask of beautiful fury. She whirled back. She stood rigid, screaming lividly to Papa Bocito and the old hag.

"Go back! Go back!" she railed. "We have waited too long! It is dawn!"

She ran across the floor, grappling with them. Her lips were distorted. Her body trembled. She hurled her companions to the door. Then, as she followed them into the gloom of the passage, she turned upon Yancy with a last unholy snarl of defeated rage. And she was gone.

8

YANCY LAY LIMP. When he struggled to his feet at last and went on deck, the sun was high in the sky, bloated and crimson, struggling to penetrate the cone of fog which swirled about the ship.

The ship lay far over, careened on her side. A hundred yards distant over the port rail lay the heaven-sent sight of land—a bleak, vacant expanse of jungle-rimmed shore line.

He went deliberately to work—a task that had to be finished quickly, lest he be discovered by the inhabitants of the shore and be considered stark mad. Returning to the cabin, he took the oil lamp and carried it to the open hold. There, sprinkling the liquid over the ancient wood, he set fire to it.

Turning, he stepped to the rail. A scream of agony, unearthly and prolonged, rose up behind him. Then he was over the rail, battling in the surf.

When he staggered up on the beach, twenty minutes later, the *Golconda* was a roaring furnace. On all sides of her the flames snarled skyward, spewing through that hellish cone of vapor. Grimly Yancy turned away and trudged along the beach.

He looked back after an hour of steady plodding. The lagoon

was empty. The fog had vanished. The sun gleamed down with warm brilliance on a broad, empty expanse of sea.

Hours later he reached a settlement. Men came and talked to him, and asked curious questions. They told him he had reached Port Blair, on the southern island of the Andamans. After that, noticing the peculiar gleam of his blood-shot eyes, they took him to the home of the governor.

There he told his story—told it hesitantly, because he expected to be disbelieved, mocked.

The governor looked at him critically. "You don't expect me to understand?" the governor said. "I am not so sure, sir. This is a penal colony, a prison isle. During the past few years, more than two hundred of our convicts have died in the most curious way. Two tiny punctures in the throat. Loss of blood."

"You you must destroy the graves," Yancy muttered.

The governor nodded silently, significantly.

After that, Yancy returned to the world, alone. Always alone. Men peered into his face and shrank away from the haunted stare of his eyes. They saw the Crucifix upon his chest and wondered why, day and night, he wore his shirt flapping open, so that the billiant design glared forth.

But their curiosity was never appeased. Only Yancy knew; and Yancy was silent.

THE GIRDLE

by Joseph McCord

THE POOL OF MOTTLED LIGHT on the table-top had drifted over to where Sir John's clawlike fingers, emerging from the silk sleeve of his dressing robe, drummed slowly on the black oak.

Carson, erect on the hearth rug, had ignored the chair indicated by the fingers and was filled with a sudden resentment as he sensed the indifferent weariness of their tapping. And this old man was Pelham's father! It was all so different than he had pictured. There was no fathoming the expression of that masklike face with its impenetrable stare, settled in the cushioned depths of the wheel chair.

The heels of Carson's boots came together with a suggestion of military stiffness, and he spoke curtly: "I confess I don't understand."

And his host replied, in a curiously dry voice: "Perhaps it is not altogether necessary that you should."

The words carried a studied courtesy, but their veiled irony was not lost on the officer.

"Granted. But Pelham was my friend—if he was your son—and I am here only because he asked "

"Of course," interrupted Sir John. "Spare me the formula, if you will. He's dead. It was arranged you should come and tell me

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In its 279 issues (March 1923/September 1954), *WEIRD TALES* presented a total of 853 different names signed to stories or articles (not counting poetry), as nearly as I have been able to count in the Cockroft *Index to the Weird Fiction Magazines:* Index By Author. (Allow me a margin of error -say 5 on either side.) This does not mean 853 (give or take 5) different authors, as a number of them were pseudonyms and/or fractional authors part of a collaborating team. But of this number, I count 619 who appeared in WT once only, and who have no other listing in the index that is, did not appear in any of the other weird story magazines listed, with either stories or articles. Allow me the same margin for error as above: we still see that a considerable majority of names in *WEIRD TALES* were one-timers, even when we have also discounted for classic authors (such as Oscar Wilde); known or undiscovered pseudonyms, (such as James MacCreagh); mainstream authors of repute at the time (such as L. M. Montgomery, author of *Anne of Greeen Gables*); and top names in science fiction (such as Robert Heinlein, Lester del Rey)—we still have the same situation: the majority of WT's contributors were not repeaters, and in this respect the weird magazines that lasted for any length of time were just like the conventional magazines of fiction. JOHN McCORD, author of this short-short tale, is a member of that little-heard-from majority.

how well he died. He was to perform the same service for you, no doubt, had the circumstances been reversed. The Pelhams always die well. It's in the breed. If you insist, however—"

Carson choked back his resentment. "There were circumstances that make it seem necessary – and yet -"

"Pray get on."

"Then I'll make it short." Carson advanced a little nearer the table. "It was in a little hut I last saw him—alive. Enemy ground, newly occupied it was, and here was this hut in a small clearing. It might have been a woodcutter's and it was empty, save for some heavier furniture.

"Several of us were poking about its one room, then Pel started up a crazy ladder at one end leading to a small loft. I heard him moving around and scratching matches, then he was quiet. I walked over near the ladder and hailed him.

" 'Nothing up here but an old chest,' he came back, 'and

empty at that.' Then I heard him laugh. 'Somebody left me a Dutch Sam Browne--thought the cursed thing was a snake--felt cold!'

"I heard the lid of the chest fall, then Pel started down into the room. Partway, he turned and faced me. He had the end of a belt in each hand, holding it behind him as if he were going to wear it. I didn't notice that, though. All I saw was his face– the way he looked."

"The way he looked," prompted Sir John, as the younger man stared at him soberly. "And, pray how did he look;"

Carson seemed to pull himself together with an effort. "That's exactly what I have to tell you. I'll try to." He seated himself on the edge of the table, one booted foot swinging nervously. "Why, it was his eyes, I think – yes, that's what it was. There was something in them that shouldn't ever be in a man's eyes. You've seen a dog that was vicious and a coward all at the same time. He wants to go at your throat and something holds him for the moment." He drew a long breath. "It was like that."

Sir John was watching one of his visitor's hands; it had gripped the edge of the table and the knuckles were white.

"As you say, like a dog. Well?"

At the quiet words, the younger man relaxed. "Yes, sir," he agreed gratefully. Then: "I spoke to him, but he didn't answer. He came on down the ladder, slowly still facing us. The others were drawing up behind me – I could feel them. We all watched Pel. It wasn't that he just moved slowly either - - it was something different. Slinking! I think that's the way to say it. And he watched us - never blinked. No one said a word.

"When Pel's feet hit the floor, he began moving toward the door – it had come shut. He backed to it and began feeling for the latch with one hand, holding the belt all the time. He kicked the door open with his heel.

"Then I knew we were losing him – if you can understand what I mean – knew he had to be saved . . . from something!"

Carson's voice was curiously restrained. "I wanted to stop him – I tell you, I did want to! I tried. I started for him."

"And the belt?" interposed Sir John quietly.

"The belt," echoed the other man dully. "Oh yes. He held it all the while – I just told you that."

"But he escaped."

"He did. I scarcely moved. He gave a dreadful sort of cry and leaped out of the doorway – backward. We rushed it then. But he had made the trees and we could hear him crashing through the undergrowth, as though there hadn't been a German within a hundred miles of us. That's how he went."

There was a heavy silence, broken only by a coal falling in the grate. With a long sigh, Carson raised his head. He fumbled with a pack of cigarettes, thrust one between his lips, but made no move to light it.

"I am waiting," came the voice from the chair.

"Waiting?"

"Come, come! You tell me my son is dead. If I recollect, you mentioned gallantry. So far you have suggested desertion. The details."

"Oh . . . yes. The details. But you won't believe them. One would have had to have seen."

"Have the kindness." Sir John leaned back wearily among his cushions and closed his eyes.

"Well . . . it was the third evening after that – I think it was the third. There had been an advance, a lot of machine-gun work. It was growing dark, I remember. Harvey, my sergeant, came up and asked if he could speak to me. 'I've seen Lieutenant Pelham,' he whispered queerly.

" 'He's dead?' I said. I knew he was dead.

" 'Yes, he's dead, sir,' says Harvey, 'but there's something queer about him. Will you have a look?'

"He lead the way and I followed." Carson's voice was becoming strained again. Sir John leaned forward and stared steadily into his eyes.

We came to a little open place. There was some light there—enough to see the most dreadful group God ever bunched in one place! First I saw Pel—sitting with his back against a little tree, chin on his knees. He was staring straight to the front—dead.

Five German infantrymen—dead, too. Dragged into a sort of semicircle. And they weren't shot and they weren't gassed—nothing like that. Every one had his throat torn—torn!"

Carson leaned close to the old man; his voice shrilled as he demanded almost piteously, "You hear me, don't you?"

"They would be torn," said Sir John Pelham very quietly. "Finish your story."

The officer pulled himself together with an effort. "It makes it easier, having you understand. I've seen men –" He thrust the fingers of one hand into the collar of his tunic, as though it choked him. "I've seen men, sir, meet death in a thousand ways but not, not that way! And Pel wasn't marked at all — I looked."

The father leaned forward in his chair, but the gesture of interest was not reflected in his impassive face. "What of the belt?"

"He wasn't wearing it, but the thing was there – lying at his feet. And it was coiled."

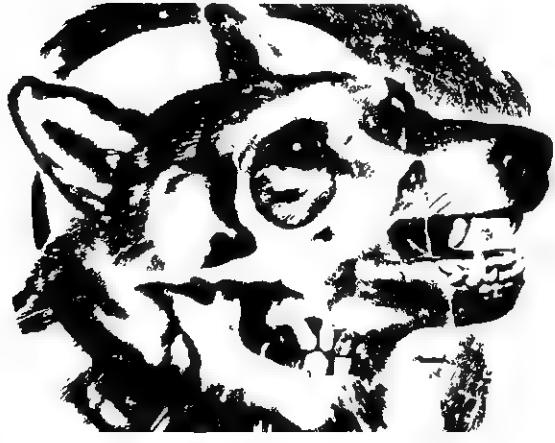
"Show it to me."

"Why I – yes, I took it. I used a bayonet – scooped it into my kit bag – next day I got mine. I'm just out of the hospital by a month. Otherwise, I'd have been here sooner."

With an unexpected clutch at the wheels of his chair, Sir John was close to the table, one white hand extended. "Give it to me."

An instant's hesitation, then Carson slowly pulled a paper-wrapped object from his pocket, laid it easily on the table. "It's in there," he muttered. "I don't like the damned thing."

With deft fingers, the baronet loosened the paper, shook the contents out on to the table. There lay the leathern belt, coiled compactly. In the waning light it was of pale brown color, thin and very flexible. On the other end was a metal clasp, its surface cut with marks that might or might not have been characters. There was a reading lens lying near and Sir John used it to study the coiled strap. He examined it grimly, from many angles, without once touching it. Finished, he leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully tapped the palm of his hand with the lens.



"Captain Carson."

"Sir."

"Attend most carefully to what I say – follow my instructions exactly. Take that belt in one hand only. Carry it to the hearth lay it directly on the coals. When it is burned, quite burned, you may tell me."

Carson got slowly to his feet. With a hand that was none too steady, he reached for the coiled belt, lifted it a few inches from the table. At his touch, seemingly the coil loosened; it started to unroll. He caught at it with both hands.

For a fraction of a second, his body seemed caught in a strained tension. Then he began backing away from the table, noiselessly, furtively. With an end of the belt in each hand, he shifted his eyes to Sir John and they glowed with a strange, sinister light. From his sagging jaw came his tongue, licking.

Screaming an oath, Sir John flung the reading lens with all his frail strength full into that distorted face. "Drop it!" he roared. "Jarvis!"

At the call, an elderly man came hurrying. He saw his master supporting himself on the arms of the chair, trembling with the exertion, and staring curiously at the uniformed visitor. Carson

was swaying unsteadily, one hand pressed against his face, blood trickling from between his fingers. At his feet lay the belt and the shattered lens. Jarvis saw all this and took his post near Sir John, awaiting orders.

"Jarvis."

"Yes, sir," said the man-servant evenly.

Sir John sank back wearily. "The tongs, Jarvis. Fetch the tongs. Pick up that strap only with the tongs, mind you; don't let your hands touch it. So. Now lay it down on the coals. Hold it down hard."

The three watched the burning in deep silence, watched the belt writhe and twist in the heat, scorch with flame, fall in charred fragments."

"Jarvis."

"Yes, sir."

"Lights, then brandy for our guest. You may bring things and patch that cut for him." To Carson: "Sit down, man, and pull yourself together. I regret that I was obliged to strike you, but under the circumstances, you will agree that it was necessary, I think."

"I don't understand," muttered Carson. dully. He slumped weakly into a nearby chair. "I'm I felt -- I don't know." His voice trailed off, his chin sagged on his breast.

"You don't wish to eat, by any chance?"

"What made you ask that? God, not! I couldn't eat – I only – But. Jarvis was offering him brandy.

"None for me," said Sir John shortly. "But you may help me over to the far case I am looking for a book."

In a few moments, Jarvis had wheeled him back to the table and he was leafing through the pages of a small volume he had found. It was bound in parchment and bore evidence of great age. Carson shiveringly helped himself to another drink, as his host turned the crackling pages until he found what he sought. Tracing the lines with a lean forefinger, he read silently for a moment, then looked shrewedly at his guest.

"This may interest you, Captain. Read here," and he indicated the place.

Carson slowly deciphered the strange script of the hand-printed page:

> *Another means wherethrough men have become werewolves is that they in som measure getten a belt or girdel maked of human skin. By an antentyke cronicle a yoman hadde such a girdel which he kept locken in a cheste secrely. It so felle on a day that he let the cheste unlocken and his litel sone getteth the girdel and girteth his middel with it. In a minute the childe was transmewed into a marvilously wilde beste but the yoman fortuned to enter the house and with spede he removed the girdel and so cured his sone who sayde he remembered naught save a ravissing apepetyt.*

The book slipped from Carson's nerveless fingers. Wide-eyed, he stared into Sir John's impassive face. When he could find the words: "God! You never mean – you couldn't mean –"

"I was in hopes," mused the old man, "you know I was quite in hopes that you would feel hungry."

THE TRAP

by Henry S. Whitehead

The Rev. HENRY S. WHITEHEAD did not appear in the first issue of Harry Bates's *STRANGE TALES*, whether because the editor did not see a submission from him in time, or because a story by him was set up, but crowded out of the issue, we do not know. At any rate, Bates saw to it that HSW was represented in every issue thereafter, and he holds the record for the highest number of stories in St. His reputation with readers of weird fiction began earlier, with *Tea Leaves* in *WEIRD TALES'* famous anniversary issue (the May/June/July 1924 issues bound together; they were never released separately); and when the magazine resumed under the aegis of Farnsworth Wright toward the end of that year, now back to the original pulp size format, his first issue (November) carried *The Door*, by Whitehead. He would have a total of 25 tales in WT and 6 in ST before his untimely passing in 1932. Several of his stories were reprinted by popular demand, in WT's special reprint department—one of them, *The Passing of a God*, twice (original appearance, January 1931; reprinted December 1938 and July 1954). Two collections of his tales were issued by Arkham House: *Jumbee and Other Uncanny Tales* in 1944, and *West India Lights* in 1946; the first collection is out of print, but the second can still be obtained from the F. and S.F. Book Co., P.O. Box 415, Staten Island, New York 10302 @ the original publisher's price of $3.00.

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IT WAS ON A CERTAIN THURSDAY morning in December, 192- that the whole thing began with that unaccountable motion I thought I saw in my antique Copenhagen mirror. Something, it seemed to me, stirred – something reflected in the glass, though I was alone in my quarters. I paused and looked intently, then, deciding that the effect must be a pure illusion, resumed the interrupted brushing of my hair.

I had discovered the old mirror, covered with dust and cobwebs, in an outbuilding of an abandoned estate-house in Santa Cruz's sparsely settled Northside territory, and had brought it to the United States from the Virgin Islands. The venerable glass was dim from more than two hundred years' exposure to a tropical climate, and the graceful ornamentation along the top of the gilt frame had been badly smashed. I had had the detached pieces set back into the frame before placing it in storage with my other belongings.

Now, several years later, I was staying half as a guest and half as a tutor at the private school of my old friend Browne on a windy Connecticut hillside–occupying an unused wing in one of the dormitories, where I had two rooms and a hallway to myself. The old mirror, stowed securely in mattresses, was the first of my possessions to be unpacked on my arrival; and I had set it up majestically in the living-room, on top of an old rosewood console which had belonged to my great-grandmother.

The door of my bedroom was just opposite that of the living-room, with a hallway between; and I had noticed that by looking into my chiffonier glass I could see the larger mirror through the two doorways–which was exactly like glancing down an endless, though diminishing, corridor. On this Thursday morning I thought I saw a curious suggestion of motion down that normally empty corridor but, as I have said, soon dismissed the notion.

When I reached the diningroom I found everyone complaining of the cold, and learned that the school's heating-plant was temporarily out of order. Being especially sensitive to low temperatures, I was myself an acute sufferer; and at once decided not to brave any freezing schoolroom that day. Accordingly I

invited my class to come over to my living-room for an informal session around my grate-fire a suggestion which the boys received enthusiastically.

After the session one of the boys, Robert Grandison, asked if he might remain; since he had no appointment for the second morning period. I told him to stay, and welcome. He sat down to study in front of the fireplace in a comfortable chair.

It was not long, however, before Robert moved to another chair somewhat farther away from the freshly replenished blaze, this change bringing him directly opposite the old mirror. From my own chair in another part of the room I noticed how fixedly he began to look at the dim, cloudy glass, and, wondering what so greatly interested him, was reminded of my own experience earlier that morning. As time passed he continued to gaze, a slight frown knitting his brows.

At last I quietly asked him what had attracted his attention. Slowly, and still wearing the puzzled frown, he looked over and replied rather cautiously:

"It's the corrugations in the glass—or whatever they are, Mr. Canevin. I was noticing how they all seem to run from a certain point. Look—I'll show you what I mean."

The boy jumped up, went over to the mirror, and placed his finger on a point near its lower left-hand corner.

"It's right here, sir," he explained, turning to look toward me and keeping his finger on the chosen spot.

His muscular action in turning may have pressed his finger against the glass. Suddenly he withdrew his hand as though with some slight effort, and with a faintly muttered "Ouch." Then he looked back at the glass in obvious mystification.

"What happened?" I asked, rising and approaching.

"Why—it—" He seemed embarrassed. "It—I—felt—well, as though it were pulling my finger into it. Seems—er—perfectly foolish, sir, but—well—it was a most peculiar sensation." Robert had an unusual vocabulary for his twelve years.

I came over and had him show me the exact spot he meant.

"You'll think I'm rather a fool, sir," he said shamefacedly,

illustration by H.W. Wesso.

"but well, from right here I can't be absolutely sure. From the chair it seemed to be clear enough."

Now thoroughly interested, I sat down in the chair Robert had occupied and looked at the spot he selected on the mirror. Instantly the thing "jumped out at me." Unmistakably, from that particular angle, all the many whorls in the ancient glass appeared to converge like a large number of spread strings held in one hand and radiating out in streams.

Getting up and crossing to the mirror, I could no longer see the curious spot. Only from certain angles, apparently, was it

visible. Directly viewed, that portion of the mirror did not even give back a normal reflection for I could not see my face in it. Manifestly I had a minor puzzle on my hands.

Presently the school gong sounded, and the fascinated Robert Grandison departed hurriedly, leaving me alone with my odd little problem in optics. I raised several window-shades, crossed the hallway, and sought for the spot in the chiffonier mirror's reflection. Finding it readily, I looked very intently and thought I again detected something of the "motion." I craned my neck, and at last, at a certain angle of vision, the thing again "jumped out at me."

The vague "motion" was now positive and definite–an appearance of torsional movement, or of whirling, much like a minute yet intense whirlwind or waterspout, or a huddle of autumn leaves dancing circularly in an eddy of wind along a level lawn. It was, like Earth's, a double motion - around and around, and at the same time *inward*, as if the whorls poured themselves endlessly toward some point inside the glass. Fascinated, yet realizing that the thing must be an illusion, I grasped an impression of quite distinct *suction,* and thought of Robert's embarrassed explanation: *"I felt as though it were pulling my finger into it."*

A kind of slight chill ran suddenly up and down my backbone. There was something here distinctly worth looking into. And as the idea of investigation came to me, I recalled the rather wistful expression of Robert Grandison when the gong called him to class. I remembered how he had looked back over his shoulder as he walked obediently out into the hallway, and resolved that he should be included in whatever analysis I might make of this little mystery.

Exciting events connected with that same Robert, however, were soon to chase all thoughts of the mirror from my consciousness for a time. I was away all that afternoon, and did not return to the school until the five-fifteen "Call-Over" -a general assembly at which the boys' attendance was compulsory. Dropping in at this function with the idea of picking Robert up

for a session with the mirror, I was astonished and pained to find him absent—a very unusual and unaccountable thing in his case. That evening Browne told me that the boy had actually disappeared, a search in his room, in the gymnasium, and in all other accustomed places being unavailing, though all his belongings including his outdoor clothing—were in their proper places.

He had not been encountered on the ice or with any of the hiking groups that afternoon, and telephone calls to all the school-catering merchants of the neighborhood were in vain. There was, in short, no record of his having been seen since the end of the lesson periods at two-fifteen; when he had turned up the stairs toward his room in Dormitory Number Three.

When the disappearance was fully realized, the resulting sensation was tremendous throughout the school. Browne, as headmaster, had to bear the brunt of it; and such an unprecedented occurrence in his well-regulated, highly-organized institution left him quite bewildered. It was learned that Robert had not run away to his home in western Pennsylvania, nor did any of the searching-parties of boys and masters find any trace of him in the snowy countryside around the school. So far as could be seen, he had simply vanished.

Robert's parents arrived on the afternoon of the second day after his disappearance. They took their trouble quietly, though, of course, they were staggered by this unexpected disaster. Browne looked ten years older for it, but there was absolutely nothing that could be done. By the fourth day the case had settled down in the opinion of the school as an insoluble mystery. Mr. and Mrs. Grandison went reluctantly back to their home, and on the following morning the ten days' Christmas vacation began.

Boys and masters departed in anything but the usual holiday spirit; and Browne and his wife were left, along with the servants, as my only fellow-occupants of the big place. Without the masters and boys it seemed a very hollow shell indeed.

* * *

That afternoon I sat in front of my grate-fire thinking about Robert's disappearance and evolving all sorts of fantastic theories to account for it. By evening I had acquired a bad headache, and ate a light supper accordingly. Then, after a brisk walk around the massed buildings, I returned to my living-room and took up the burden of thought once more.

A little after ten o'clock I awakened in my armchair, stiff and chilled, from a doze during which I had let the fire go out. I was physically uncomfortable, yet mentally aroused by a peculiar sensation of expectancy and possible hope. Of course it had to do with the problem that was harassing me. For I had started from that inadvertent nap with a curious, persistent idea—the odd idea that a tenuous, hardly recognizable Robert Grandison had been trying desperately to communicate with me. I finally went to bed with one conviction unreasoningly strong in my mind. Somehow I was sure that young Robert Grandison was still alive.

That I should be receptive of such a notion will not seem strange to those who know of my long residence in the West Indies and my close contact with unexplained happenings there. It will not seem strange, either, that I fell asleep with an urgent desire to establish some sort of mental communication with the missing boy. Even the most prosaic scientists affirm, with Freud, Jung, and Adler, that the subconscious mind is most open to external impression in sleep; though such impressions are seldom carried over intact into the waking state.

Going a step further and granting the existence of telepathic forces, it follows that such forces must act most strongly on a sleeper; so that if I were ever to get a definite message from Robert, it would be during a period of profoundest slumber. Of course, I might lose the message in waking; but my aptitude for retaining such things has been sharpened by types of mental discipline picked up in various obscure corners of the globe.

I must have dropped asleep instantaneously, and from the vividness of my dreams and the absence of wakeful intervals I judge that my sleep was a very deep one. It was six forty-five when I awakened, and there still lingered with me certain

impressions which I knew were carried over from the world of somnolent cerebration. Filling my mind was the vision of Robert Grandison strangely transformed to a boy of a dull greenish dark-blue color; Robert desperately endeavoring to communicate with me by means of speech, yet finding some almost insuperable difficulty in so doing. A wall of curious spatial separation seemed to stand between him and me—a mysterious, invisible wall which completely baffled us both.

I had seen Robert as though at some distance, yet queerly enough he seemed at the same time to be just beside me. He was both larger and smaller than in real life, his apparent size varying *directly*, instead of *inversely*, with the distance as he advanced and retreated in the course of conversation. That is, he grew larger instead of smaller to my eye when he stepped away or backwards, and vice versa; as if the laws of perspective in his case had been wholly reversed. His aspect was misty and uncertain—as if he lacked sharp or permanent outlines; and the anomalies of his coloring and clothing baffled me utterly at first.

At some point in my dream Robert's vocal efforts had finally crystallized into audible speech—albeit speech of an abnormal thickness and dullness. I could not for a time understand anything he said, and even in the dream racked my brain for a clue to where he was, what he wanted to tell, and why his utterance was so clumsy and unintelligible. Then little by little I began to distinguish words and phrases, the very first of which sufficed to throw my dreaming self into the wildest excitement and to establish a certain mental connection which had previously refused to take conscious form because of the utter incredibility of what it implied.

I do not know how long I listened to those halting words amidst my deep slumber, but hours must have passed while the strangely remote speaker struggled on with his tale. There was revealed to me such a circumstance as I cannot hope to make others believe without the strongest corroborative evidence, yet which I was quite ready to accept as truth—both in the dream and after waking—because of my formed contacts with uncanny things. The boy was obviously watching my face—mobile in

receptive sleep—as he choked along; for about the time I began to comprehend him, his own expression brightened and gave signs of gratitude and hope.

Any attempt to hint at Robert's message, as it lingered in my ears after a sudden awakening in the cold, brings this narrative to a point where I must choose my words with the greatest care. Everything involved is so difficult to record that one tends to flounder helplessly. I have said that the revelation established in my mind a certain connection which reason had not allowed me to formulate consciously before. This connection, I need no longer hesitate to hint, had to do with the old Copenhagen mirror whose suggestions of motion had so impressed me on the morning of the disappearance, and whose whorl-like contours and apparent illusions of suction had later exerted such a disquieting fascination on both Robert and me.

Resolutely, though my outer consciousness had previously rejected what my intuition would have liked to imply, it could reject that stupendous conception no longer. What was fantasy in the tale of "Alice" now came to me as a grave and immediate reality. That looking-glass had indeed possessed a malign, abnormal suction; and the struggling speaker in my dream made clear the extent to which it violated all the known precedents of human experience and all the age-old laws of our three sane dimensions. It was more than a mirror—it was a gate; a trap; a link with spatial recesses not meant for the denizens of our visible universe, and realizable only in terms of the most intricate non-Euclidean mathematics. *And in some outrageous fashion Robert Grandison had passed out of our ken into the glass and was there immured, waiting for release.*

It is significant that upon awakening I harbored no genuine doubt of the reality of the revelation. That I had actually held conversation with a trans-dimensional Robert, rather than evoked the whole episode from my broodings about his disappearance and about the old illusions of the mirror, was as certain to my inmost instincts as any of the instinctive certainties commonly recognized as valid.

The tale thus unfolded to me was of the most incredibly

bizarre character. As had been clear on the morning of his disappearance, Robert was intensely fasinated by the ancient mirror. All through the hours of school, he had it in mind to come back to my living-room and examine it further. When he did arrive, after the close of the school day, it was somewhat later than two-twenty, and I was absent in town. Finding me out and knowing that I would not mind, he had come into my living-room and gone straight to the mirror; standing before it and studying the place where, as we had noted, the whorls appeared to converge.

Then, quite suddenly, there had come to him an overpowering urge to place his hand upon this whorl-center. Almost reluctantly, against his better judgment, he had done so; and upon making the contact had felt at once the strange, almost painful suction which had perplexed him that morning. Immediately thereafter—quite without warning, but with a wrench which seemed to twist and tear every bone and muscle in his body and to bulge and press and cut at every nerve—he had been abruptly *drawn through* and found himself *inside*.

Once through, the excruciatingly painful stress upon his entire system was suddenly released. He felt, he said, as though he had just been born—a feeling that made itself evident every time he tried to do anything; walk, stoop, turn his head, or utter speech. Everything about his body seemed a misfit.

These sensations wore off after a long while, Robert's body becoming an organized whole rather than a number of protesting parts. Of all the forms of expression, speech remained the most difficult; doubtless because it is complicated, bringing into play a number of different organs, muscles, and tendons. Robert's feet, on the other hand, were the first members to adjust themselves to the new conditions within the glass.

During the morning hours I rehearsed the whole reason-defying problem; correlating everything I had seen and heard, dismissing the natural scepticism of a man of sense, and scheming to devise possible plans for Robert's release from his incredible prison. As I did so a number of originally perplexing points became clear—or at least, clearer—to me.

There was, for example, the matter of Robert's coloring. His face and hands, as I have indicated, were a kind of dull greenish dark-blue; and I may add that his familiar blue Norfolk jacket had turned to a pale lemon-yellow while his trousers remained a neutral gray as before. Reflecting on this after waking, I found the circumstance closely allied to the reversal of perspective which made Robert seem to grow larger when receding and smaller when approaching. Here, too, was a physical *reversal*—for every detail of his coloring in the unknown dimension was the exact reverse or complement of the corresponding color detail in normal life. In physics the typical complementary colors are blue and yellow, and red and green. These pairs are opposites, and when mixed yield gray. Robert's natural color was a pinkish-buff, the opposite of which is the greenish-blue I saw. His blue coat had become yellow, while the gray trousers remained gray. This latter point baffled me until I remembered that gray is itself a mixture of opposites. There is no opposite for gray -or rather, it is its own opposite.

Another clarified point was that pertaining to Robert's curiously dulled and thickened speech—as well as to the general awkwardness and sense of misfit bodily parts of which he had complained. This, at the outset, was a puzzle indeed; though after long thought the clue occurred to me. Here again was the same *reversal* which affected perspective and coloration. Anyone in the fourth dimension must necessarily be reversed in just this way—hands and feet, as well as colors and perspectives, being changed about. It would be the same with all the other dual organs, such as nostrils, ears, and eyes. Thus Robert had been talking with a reversed tongue, teeth, vocal cords, and kindred speech-apparatus; so that his difficulties in utterance were little to be wondered at.

As the morning wore on, my sense of the stark reality and maddening urgency of the dream disclosed situation increased rather than decreased. More and more I felt that something must be done, yet realized that I could not seek advice or aid. Such a story as mine—a conviction based upon mere dreaming—could not conceivably bring me anything but ridicule or suspicions as

to my mental state. And what, indeed, could I do, aided or unaided, with as little working data as my nocturnal impressions had provided? I must, I finally recognized, have more information before I could even think of a possible plan for releasing Robert. This could come only through the receptive conditions of sleep, and it heartened me to reflect that according to every probability my telepathic contact would be resumed the moment I fell into deep slumber again.

I accomplished sleeping that afternoon, after a midday dinner at which, through rigid self-control, I succeeded in concealing from Browne and his wife the tumultuous thoughts that crashed through my mind. Hardly had my eyes closed when a dim telepathic image began to appear; and I soon realized to my infinite excitement that it was identical with what I had seen before. If anything, it was more distinct; and when it began to speak I seemed able to grasp a greater proportion of the words.

During this sleep I found most of the morning's deductions confirmed, though the interview was mysteriously cut off long prior to my awakening. Robert had seemed apprehensive just before communication ceased, but had already told me that in his strange fourth-dimensional prison colors and spatial relationships were indeed reversed—black being white, distance increasing apparent size, and so on.

He had also intimated that, notwithstanding his possessions of full physical form and sensations, most human vital properties seemed curiously suspended. Nutriment, for example, was quite unnecessary—a phenomenon really more singular than the omnipresent reversal of objects and attributes, since the latter was a reasonable and mathematically indicated state of things. Another significant piece of information was that the only exit from the glass to the world was the entrance-way, and that this was permanently barred and impenetrably sealed, so far as egress was concerned.

That night I had another visitation from Robert; nor did such impressions, received at odd intervals while I slept receptively-minded, cease during the entire period of his incarceration. His efforts to communicate were desperate and

often pitiful; for at times the telepathic bond would weaken, while at other times fatigue, excitement, or fear of interruption would hamper and thicken his speech.

I may as well narrate as a continuous whole all that Robert told me throughout the whole series of transient mental contacts—perhaps supplementing it at certain points with facts directly related after his release. The telepathic information was fragmentary and often nearly inarticulate, but I studied it over and over during the waking intervals of three intense days; classifying and cogitating with feverish diligence, since it was all that I had to go upon if the boy were to be brought back into our world.

The fourth-dimensional region in which Robert found himself was not, as in scientific romance, an unknown and infinite realm of strange sights and fantastic denizens; but was rather a projection of certain limited parts of our own terrestrial sphere within an alien and normally inaccessible aspect or direction of space. It was a curiously fragmentary, intangible, and heterogeneous world -a series of apparently dissociated scenes merging indistinctly one into the other; their constituent details having an obviously different status from that of an object drawn into the ancient mirror as Robert had been drawn. These scenes were like dream-vistas or magic-lantern images—elusive visual impressions of which the boy was not really a part, but which formed a sort of panoramic background or ethereal environment against which or amidst which he moved.

He could not touch any of the parts of these scenes—walls, trees, furniture, and the like—but whether this was because they were truly non-material, or because they always receded at his approach, he was singularly unable to determine. Everything seemed fluid, mutable, and unreal. When he walked, it appeared to be on whatever lower surface the visible scene might have—floor, path, greensward, or such; but upon analysis he always found that the contact was an illusion. There was never any difference in the resisting force met by his feet—and by his hands when he would stoop experimentally—no matter what

changes of apparent surface might be involved. He could not describe this foundation or limiting plane on which he walked as anything more definite than a virtually abstract pressure balancing his gravity. Of definite tactile distinctiveness it had none, and supplementing it there seemed to be a kind of restricted levitational force which accomplished transfers of altitude. He could never actually climb stairs, yet would gradually walk up from a lower level to a higher.

Passage from one definite scene to another involved a sort of gliding through a region of shadow of blurred focus where the details of each scene mingled curiously. All the vistas were distinguished by the absence of transient objects, as furniture or details of vegetation. The lighting of every scene was diffuse and perplexing, and of course the scheme of reversed colors bright red grass, yellow sky with confused black and gray cloud-forms, white tree-trunks, and green brick walls -gave to everything an air of unbelievable grotesquerie. There was an alteration of day and night, which turned out to be a reversal of the normal hours of light and darkness at whatever point on Earth the mirror might be hanging.

This seemingly irrelevant diversity of the scenes puzzled Robert until he realized that they comprised merely such places as had been reflected for long continuous periods in the ancient glass. This also explained the odd absence of transient objects, the generally arbitrary boundaries of vision, and the fact that all exteriors were framed by the outlines of doorways or windows. The glass, it appeared, had power to store up these intangible scenes through long exposure; though it could never absorb anything corporeally, as Robert had been absorbed, except by a very different and particular process.

But—to me at least—the most incredible aspect of the mad phenomenon was the monstrous subversion of our known laws of space involved in the relation of the various illusory scenes to the actual terrestrial regions represented. I have spoken of the glass as storing up the images of these regions, but this is really an inexact definition. In truth, each of the mirror scenes formed a true and quasi-permanent fourth-dimensional projection of the

corresponding mundane region; so that whenever Robert moved to a certain part of a certain scene, as he moved into the image of my room when sending his telepathic messages, *he was actually in that place itself, on Earth*—though under spatial conditions which cut off all sensory communication, in either direction, between him and the present tri-dimensional aspect of the place.

Theoretically speaking, a prisoner in the glass could in a few moments go anywhere on our planet—into any place, that is, which had ever been reflected in the mirror's surface. This probably applied even to places where the mirror had not hung long enough to produce a clear illusory scene; the terrestrial region being then represented by a zone of more or less formless shadow. Outside the definite scenes was a seemingly limitless waste of neutral gray shadow about which Robert could never be certain, and into which he never dared stray far lest he become hopelessly lost to the real and mirror worlds alike.

Among the earliest particulars which Robert gave, was the fact that he was not alone in his confinement. Various others, all in antique garb, were in there with him—a corpulent middle-aged gentleman with tied queue and velvet knee-breeches who spoke English fluently though with a marked Scandinavian accent; a rather beautiful small girl with very blonde hair which appeared as glossy dark blue; two apparently mute Negroes whose features contrasted grotesquely with the pallor of their reversed-colored skins; three young men; one young woman; a very small child, almost an infant; and a lean, elderly Dane of extremely distinctive aspect and a kind of half-malign intellectuality of countenance.

This last named individual Axel Holm, who wore the satin small-clothes, flared-skirted coat, and voluminous full-bottomed periwig of an age more than two centuries in the past—was notable among the little band as being the one responsible for the presence of them all. He it was who, skilled equally in the arts of magic and glass working, had long ago fashioned this strange dimensional prison in which himself, his slaves, and those whom he chose to invite or allure thither were immured unchangingly for as long as the mirror might endure.

Holm was born early in the seventeenth century, and had followed with tremendous competence and success the trade of a glass-blower and molder in Copenhagen. His glass, especially in the form of large drawing-room mirrors, was always at a premium. But the same bold mind which had made him the first glazier of Europe also served to carry his interests and ambitions far beyond the sphere of mere material craftsmanship. He had studied the world around him, and chafed at the limitations of human knowledge and capability. Eventually he sought for dark ways to overcome those limitations, and gained more success than is good for any mortal.

He had aspired to enjoy something like eternity, the mirror being his provision to secure this end. Serious study of the fourth dimension was far from beginning with Einstein in our own era; and Holm, more than erudite in all the methods of his day, knew that a bodily entrance into that hidden phase of space would prevent him from dying in the ordinary physical sense. Research showed him that the principle of reflection undoubtedly forms the chief gate to all dimensions beyond our familiar three; and chance placed in his hands a small and very ancient glass whose cryptic properties he believed he could turn to advantage. Once "inside" this mirror according to the method he had envisaged, he felt that "life" in the sense of form and consciousness would go on virtually forever, provided the mirror could be preserved indefinitely from breakage or deterioration.

Holm made a magnificent mirror, such as would be prized and carefully preserved; and in it deftly fused the strange whorl-configured relic he had acquired. Having thus prepared his refuge and his trap, he began to plan his mode of entrance and conditions of tenancy. He would have with him both servitors and companions; and as an experimental beginning he sent before him into the glass two dependable Negro slaves brought from the West Indies. What his sensations must have been upon beholding this first concrete demonstration of his theories, only imagination can conceive.

Undoubtedly a man of his knowledge realized that absence from the outside world if deferred beyond the natural span of

life of those within, must mean instant dissolution at the first attempt to return to that world. But, barring that misfortune or accidental breakage, those within would remain forever as they were at the time of entrance. They would never grow old, and would need neither food nor drink.

To make his prison tolerable he sent ahead of him certain books and writing materials, a chair and table of stoutest workmanship, and a few other accessories. He knew that the images which the glass would reflect or absorb would not be tangible, but would merely extend around him like a background of dream. His own transition in 1687 was a momentous experience; and must have been attended by mixed sensations of triumph and terror. Had anything gone wrong, there were frightful possibilities of being lost in dark and inconceivable multiple dimensions.

For over fifty years he had been unable to secure any additions to the little company of himself and slaves, but later on he had perfected his telepathic method of visualizing small sections of the outside world close to the glass, and attracting certain individuals in those areas through the mirror's strange entrance. Thus Robert, influenced into a desire to press upon the "door," had been lured within. Such visualizations depended wholly on telepathy, since no one inside the mirror could see out into the world of men.

It was, in truth, a strange life that Holm and his company had lived inside the glass. Since the mirror had stood for fully a century with its face to the dusty stone wall of the shed where I found it, Robert was the first being to enter this limbo after all that interval. His arrival was a gala event, for he brought news of the outside world which must have been of the most startling impressiveness to the more thoughtful of those within. He, in his turn—young though he was—felt overwhelmingly the weirdness of meeting and talking with persons who had been alive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The deadly monotony of life for the prisoners can only be vaguely conjectured. As mentioned, its extensive spatial variety was limited to localities which had been reflected in the mirror

for long periods; and many of these had become dim and strange as tropical climates had made inroads on the surface. Certain localities were bright and beautiful, and in these the company usually gathered. But no scene could be fully satisfying; since the visible objects were all unreal and intangible, and often of perplexingly indefinite outline. When the tedious periods of darkness came, the general custom was to indulge in memories, reflections, or conversations. Each one of that strange, pathetic group had retained his or her personality unchanged and unchangeable, since becoming immune to the time effects of outside space.

The number of inanimate objects within the glass, aside from the clothing of the prisoners, was very small; being largely limited to the accessories Holm had provided for himself. The rest did without even furniture, since sleep and fatigue had vanished along with most other vital attributes. Such inorganic things as were present, seemed as exempt from decay as the living beings. The lower forms of animal life were wholly absent.

Robert derived most of his information from Herr Thiele, the gentleman who spoke English with a Scandinavian accent. This portly Dane had taken a fancy to him, and talked at considerable length. The others, too, had received him with courtesy and good-will; Holm himself, seeming well-disposed, had told him about various matters including the door of the trap.

The boy, as he told me later, was sensible enough never to attempt communication with me when Holm was nearby. Twice, while thus engaged, he had seen Holm appear; and had accordingly ceased at once. At no time could I see the world behind the mirror's surface. Robert's visual image, which included his bodily form and the clothing connected with it, was—like the aural image of his halting voice and like his own visualization of myself—a case of purely telepathic transmission; and did not involve true inter-dimensional sight. However, had Robert been as trained a telepathist as Holm, he might have transmitted a few strong images apart from his immediate person.

Throughout this period of revelation I had, of course, been desperately trying to devise a method for Robert's release. On

the fourth day—the ninth after the disappearance—I hit on a solution. Everything considered, my laboriously formulated process was not a very complicated one; though I could not tell beforehand how it would work, while the possibility of ruinous consequences in case of a slip was appalling. This process depended, basically, on the fact that there was no possible exit from inside the glass. If Holm and his prisoners were permanently sealed in, then release must come wholly from outside. Other considerations included the disposal of the other prisoners, if any survived, and especially of Axel Holm. What Robert had told me of him was anything but reassuring; and I certainly did not wish him loose in my apartment, free once more to work his evil will upon the world. The telepathic messages had not made fully clear the effect of liberation on those who had entered the glass so long ago.

There was, too, a final though minor problem in case of success—that of getting Robert back into the routine of school life without having to explain the incredible. In case of failure, it was highly inadvisable to have witnesses present at the release operations—and lacking these, I simply could not attempt to relate the actual facts if I should succeed. Even to me the reality seemed a mad one whenever I let my mind turn from the data so compellingly presented in that tense series of dreams.

When I had thought these problems through as far as possible, I procured a large magnifying-glass from the school laboratory and studied minutely every square millimenter of that whorl-center which presumably marked the extent of the original ancient mirror used by Holm. Even with this aid I could not quite trace the exact boundary between the old area and the surface added by the Danish wizard; but after a long study decided on a conjectural oval boundary which I outlined very precisely with a soft blue pencil, I then made a trip to Stamford, where I procured a heavy glass-cutting tool; for my primary idea was to remove the ancient and magically potent mirror from its later setting.

My next step was to figure out the best time of day to make the crucial experiment. I finally settled on two-thirty A.M.—both

because it was a good season for uninterrupted work, and because it was the "opposite" of two-thirty P.M., the probable moment at which Robert had entered the mirror. This form of "oppositeness" may or may not have been relevant, but I knew at least that the chosen hour was as good as any and perhaps better than most.

I finally set to work in the early morning of the eleventh day after the disappearance, having drawn all the shades of my living-room and closed and locked the door into the hallway. Following with breathless care the elliptical line I had traced, I worked around the whorl-section with my steel-wheeled cutting tool. The ancient glass, half an inch thick, crackled crisply under the firm, uniform pressure; and upon completing the circuit I cut around it a second time, crunching the roller more deeply into the glass.

Then, very carefully indeed, I lifted the heavy mirror down from its console and leaned it face-inward against the wall; prying off two of the thin, narrow boards nailed to the back. With equal caution I smartly tapped the cut-around space with the heavy wooden handle of the glass-cutter.

At the very first tap the whorl-containing section of glass dropped out on the Bokhara rug beneath. I did not know what might happen, but was keyed up for anything, and took a deep involuntary breath. I was on my knees for convenience at the moment, with my face quite near the newly made aperture; and as I breathed there poured into my nostrils a powerful *dusty* odor -a smell not comparable to any other I have ever encountered. Then everything within my range of vision suddenly turned to a dull gray before my failing eyesight as I felt myself overpowered by an invisible force which robbed my muscles of their power to function.

I remember grasping weakly and futilely at the edge of the nearest window drapery and feeling it rip loose from its fastening. Then I sank slowly to the floor as the darkness of oblivion passed over me.

When I regained consciousness I was lying on the Bokhara rug with my legs held unaccountably up in the air. The room was full

of that hideous and inexplicable dusty smell—and as my eyes began to take in definite images I saw that Robert Grandison stood in front of me. It was he—fully in the flesh and with his coloring normal—who was holding my legs aloft to bring the blood back to my head as the school's first-aid course had taught him to do with persons who had fainted. For a moment I was struck mute by the stifling odor and by a bewilderment which quickly merged into a sense of triumph. Then I found myself able to move and speak collectedly.

I raised a tentative hand and waved feebly at Robert.

"All right, old man," I murmured, "you can let my legs down now. Many thanks. I'm all right again, I think. It was the smell—I imagine—that got me. Open that farthest window, please—wide—from the bottom. That's it—thanks. No—leave the shade down the way it was."

I struggled to my feet, my disturbed circulation adjusting itself in waves, and stood upright hanging to the back of a big chair. I was still "groggy," but a blast of fresh, bitterly cold air from the window revived me rapidly. I sat down in the big chair and looked at Robert, now walking toward me.

"First," I said hurriedly, "tell me, Robert—those others—Holm? What happend to *them,* when I opened the exit?"

Robert paused half-way across the room and looked at me very gravely.

"I saw them fade away—into nothingness—Mr. Canevin," he said with solemnity; "and with them—everything. There isn't any more 'inside,' sir—thank God, and you, sir!"

And young Robert, at last yielding to the sustained strain which he had borne through all those terrible eleven days, suddenly broke down like a little child and began to weep hysterically in great, stifling, dry sobs.

I picked him up and placed him gently on my davenport, threw a rug over him, sat down by his side, and put a calming hand on his forehead.

"Take it easy, old fellow," I said soothingly.

The boy's sudden and very natural hysteria passed as quickly

as it had come on as I talked to him reassuringly about my plans for his quiet restoration to the school. The interest of the situation and the need of concealing the incredible truth beneath a rational explanation took hold of his imagination as I had expected; and at last he sat up eagerly, telling the details of his release and listening to the instructions I had thought out. He had, it seems, been in the "projected area" of my bedroom when I opened the way back, and had emerged in that actual room—hardly realizing that he was "out." Upon hearing a fall in the living-room he had hastened thither, finding me on the rug in my fainting spell.

I need mention only briefly my method of restoring Robert in a seemingly normal way—how I smuggled him out of the window in an old hat and sweater of mine, took him down the road in my quietly started car, coached him carefully in a tale I had devised, and returned to arouse Browne with the news of his discovery. He had, I explained, been walking alone on the afternoon of his disappearance; and had been offered a motor ride by two young men who, as a joke and over his protests that he could go no farther than Stamford and back, had begun to carry him past that town. Jumping from the car during a traffic stop with the intention of hitch-hiking back before Call-Over, he had been hit by another car just as the traffic was released—awakening ten days later in the Greenwich home of the people who had hit him. On learning the date, I added, he had immediately telephoned the school; and I, being the only one awake, had answered the call and hurried after him in my car without stopping to notify anyone.

Browne, who at once telephoned to Robert's parents, accepted my story without question; and forbore to interrogate the boy because of the latter's manifest exhaustion. It was arranged that he should remain at the school for a rest, under the expert care of Mrs. Browne, a former trained nurse. I naturally saw a good deal of him during the remainder of the Christmas vacation, and was thus enabled to fill in certain gaps in his fragmentary dream-story.

Now and then we would almost doubt the actuality of what had occurred; wondering whether we had not both shared some monstrous delusion born of the mirror's glittering hypnotism, and whether the tale of the ride and accident were not after all the real truth. But whenever we did so we would be brought back to belief by some monstrous and haunting memory; with me, of Robert's dream-figure and its thick voice and inverted colors; with him, of the whole fantastic pageantry of ancient people and dead scenes that he had witnessed. And then there was the joint recollection of that damnable dusty odor . . .We knew what it meant: the instant dissolution of those who had entered an alien dimension a century and more ago.

There are, in addition, at least two lines of rather more positive evidence; one of which comes through my researches in Danish annals concerning the sorcerer, Axel Holm. Such a person, indeed, left many traces in folklore and written records; and diligent library sessions, plus conferences with various learned Danes, have shed much light on his evil frame. At present I need say only that the Copenhagen glass-blower—born in 1612—was a notorious Luciferian whose pursuits and final vanishing formed a matter of awed debate over two centuries ago. He had burned with a desire to know all things and to conquer every limitation of mankind—to which end he had delved deeply into occult and forbidden fields ever since he was a child.

He was commonly held to have joined a coven of the dreaded witchcult, and the vast lore of ancient Scandinavian myth—with its Loki the Sly One and the accursed Fenris-Wolf—was soon an open book to him. He had strange interests and objectives, few of which were definitely known, but some of which were recognized as intolerably evil. It is recorded that his two Negro helpers, originally slaves from the Danish West Indies, had become mute soon after their acquisition by him; and that they had disappeared not long before his own disappearance from the ken of mankind.

Near the close of an already long life the idea of a glass of

immortality appears to have entered his mind. That he had acquired an enchanted mirror of inconceivable antiquity was a matter of common whispering; it being alleged that he had purloined it from a fellow-sorcerer who had entrusted it to him for polishing.

This mirror—according to popular tales a trophy as potent in its way as the better-known Aegis of Minerva or Hammer of Thor—was a small oval object called "Loki's Glass," made of some polished fusible mineral and having magical properties which included the divination of the immediate future and the power to show the possessor his enemies. That it had deeper potential properties, realizable in the hands of an erudite magician, none of the common people doubted; and even educated persons attached much fearful importance to Holm's rumored attempts to incorporate it in a larger glass of immortality. Then had come the wizard's disappearance in 1687, and the final sale and dispersal of his goods amidst a growing cloud of fantastic legendry. It was, altogether, just such a story as one would laugh at if possessed of no particular key; yet to me, remembering those dream messages and having Robert Grandison's corroboration before me, it formed a positive confirmation of all the bewildering marvels that had been unfolded.

But as I have said, there is still another line of rather positive evidence—of a very different character—at my disposal. Two days after his release, as Robert, greatly improved in strength and appearance, was placing a log on my livingroom fire, I noticed a certain awkwardness in his motions and was struck by a persistent idea. Summoning him to my desk I suddenly asked him to pick up an inkstand—and was scarcely surprised to note that, despite lifelong righthandedness, he obeyed unconsciously with his left hand. Without alarming him, I then asked that he unbutton his coat and let me listen to his cardiac action. What I found upon placing my ear to his chest and what I did not tell him for some time afterward—was that *his heart was beating on his right side.*

He had gone into the glass right-handed and with all organs in their normal positions. Now he was left-handed and with organs reversed, and would doubtless continue so for the rest of his life. Clearly, the dimensional transition had been no illusion—for this physical change was tangible and unmistakable. Had there been a natural exit from the glass, Robert would probably have undergone a thorough re-reversal and emerged in perfect normality—as indeed the color-scheme of his body and clothing did emerge. The forcible nature of his release, however; undoubtedly set something awry; so that dimensions no longer had a chance to right themselves as chromatic wave-frequencies still did.

I had not merely *opened* Holm's trap; I had *destroyed* it; and at the particular stage of destruction marked by Robert's escape some of the reversing properties had perished. It is significant that in escaping Robert had felt no pain comparable to that experienced in entering. Had the destruction been still more sudden, I shiver to think of the monstrosities of color the boy would always have been forced to bear. I may add that after discovering Robert's reversal I examined the rumpled and discarded clothing he had worn in the glass, and found, as I had expected, a complete reversal of pockets, buttons, and all other corresponding details.

At this moment Loki's Glass, just as it fell on my Bokhara rug from the now patched and harmless mirror, weighs down a sheaf of papers on my writing-table here in St. Thomas, venerable capital of the Danish West Indies—now the American Virgin Islands. Various collectors of old Sandwich glass have mistaken it for an odd bit of that early American product -but I privately realize that my paperweight is an antique of far subtler and more paleologean craftsmanship. Still, I do not disillusion such enthusiasts.

THE CHURCH STOVE AT RAEBRUDAFISK

by G. Appleby Terrill

The Supreme Witch, by G. APPLEBY TERRILL, copped an indifferent cover by Senf when it appeared in the October 1926 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, but the response of the readers was anything but indifferent; not only was it voted as the best in the issue, but it was on numerous readers' "ten best" lists for many years thereafter, and requests for a reprint began to pile up. We first read it when it finally was reprinted in the January 1935 issue, and later readers would see a second reprint of it in the March 1953 number. Terrill's only other appearance in WT is far less known, although this story you are about to read was also very well received.

I THREW A PIECE OF STRING into the grate, where presently it began to smolder. Kobyssu stopped talking and sniffed. Although in appearance he is ferocious, with his little simian forehead, his black bushes of eyebrows, and his big bristling mustache, he is in reality a fellow of most pleasant, even temperament. But it was plain that the string had disturbed him greatly. His cheek had paled, and I got a glimpse of his eyes as he bent forward swiftly in his chair and leveled them at the hearth. The expression in them was twofold. There was deep anger; there was equally deep horror.

He saw the string, snatched at it, and cast it into the heart of

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the fire, so that it flamed instantly. "Pouf!" he said, waving his hands in front of his nose, and now exceedingly white.

I was amazed, but all I said was, "Sorry, I didn't think the smell would worry you."

Kobyssu looked around his cafe, deserted at this hour of the afternoon. He looked at the neat tables, at the walls, at his desk, with the air of a man who wished to assure himself that he was indeed in Wardour Street, London, and nowhere else. Then he faced the fire again, his eyes more normal but very somber.

"That smell of slow-burning hemp – it reminded me of something in Czergona."

"But," said I, "you often tell me that every memory of your native country is dear to you. Only yesterday you quoted some absurd proverb –"

" 'To a Czerg, the howl of a wolf in his homeland is more comforting than the lowing of his cattle in a foreign land.' It is a true proverb. My country may be what your newspapers call 'a barren mountain range in mid-Europe', but I love every memory of it - except one. That is a memory of dreadful things."

There was a table with coffee between our chairs. He filled my cup.

"From any country, however great and refined, one may get a memory of dreadful things," he said, defending Czergona. I nodded. "Yet," he continued, "these were strangely dreadful." He drew in his breath with a long hiss, staring broodingly at the sugar bowl. "The odor of that string recalled to me the church stove at Raebrudafisk – so suddenly, so without warning, that I believed I was back in the past, and I felt the feelings of twelve years ago - 1913. Ah-h, I had a shock."

"What about this stove? But, pardon, Kobyssu; perhaps it would pain you to tell me. Perhaps the matter is personal."

He shook his head. "I was not directly concerned, I am thankful to say. But the story is too fearful a thing to relate idly over coffee, and you would be sorry if I put in into your mind. You would strive to forget it, and never forget it – no, no, I do not want to tell it."

But my curiosity had risen high; I urged Kobyssu and he yielded.

"Raebrudafisk," he said, "is the village I was born in. It is on a hillside in a fir wood. The church, which is of stone, is a quarter of a mile from it, up the hill. When, as a little boy, I was taken to church by my parents, the stove used to interest me very much. It was not far from where we sat, near the north wall. It was an upright iron cylinder, about three feet high and two feet in diameter, having a flat top, with a flap at the edge of this, which opened so that coal and wood could be poured in. A stout pipe went from the stove right up to the roof and through it.

"In summer, of course, the stove was not lit. In winter, it was attended to by old Uflio Vaang. He would start the fire some two hours before the morning service – and why the stove interested me was this: by the time I entered the church the flat top would be a glowing red, with dazzling sparks appearing suddenly on it when specks of stuff fell there from the ceiling; and the pipe would be red, halfway to the roof, brilliant red at the base, duller the higher you looked – yet hot, you can imagine.

"I was extremely fond of that stove, especially at evening service, when snow and darkness and wolves were outside the church. I yearned to spend the night by it, and thought pastor and people would be much more sensible to do so instead of faring down the hill, all in a bunch for fear of wolves.

"And I was a young rascal! I got into the habit of flicking pieces of string on to the stove, to see them smoke and burst into flame. But a thrashing from my father, and another from the pastor, cured me of that.

"There was a good draft to the stove – it had some bars low down in front. And old Uflio, though everybody warned him not to, drenched the fuel with oil before lighting it. Stove and pipe were red long before church-time."

Kobyssu drank some coffee, and made a considerable pause. I knew he was hoping that some customer would arrive and give him a pretext for breaking off altogether. None came, however, so he shrugged and proceeded.

"Old Uflio Vaang was wonderful. He was completely blind. He had been blind since early manhood. With no difficulty he would find his own way to the church, place his hand on anything he required, and get the stove going. Dangerous work for a blind man, you will think, eh? Yet he was known to be so careful that, despite the matter of oil, people did not fear an accident. I have noticed the stove fail a trifle toward the end of a morning service, the top go from yellow scarlet to crimson; and Uflio, sensing the change, has risen from his chair and tiptoed down the church, and picked up a small tongs and opened the flap, gripping it at the first attempt; and lump by lump, not to make a loud noise, he has dropped coal into the red-hot thing, running no more peril of burning himself than would a man with two healthy eyes.

"Well, twelve years ago, when I was a swineherd of twenty, and had not commenced to think of London or even of Warsaw, old Uflio was still tending the stove. Naturally, I had lost my boyish interest in it. I never supposed that I should be interested in it again."

Kobyssu passed once more. When he resumed, such a note of sadness was in his voice that I experienced a chill – a dread and the first of my regrets at having importuned him for the story.

"Uflio Vaang had a daughter," said he; "Djira. She was sixteen, pretty, bright-natured – oh, delightful. She was the old man's only child, and, as his wife was dead, all in the world he had to care for. I was not in love with Djira. I was thinking of a girl in the next village. But the other young men of Raebrudafisk were in love with her, as, unhappily, was a man not young. That was Olk Sturl, whose age was forty, and who was often in prison for stealing or violence. He was a sullen blackguard ordinarily; when enraged he was the evilest of brutes.

"Of course, his chances to win Djira were hopeless, but I suppose he did not believe this until he waylaid her one afternoon far from our village. Then she must have convinced him. Would she had not, poor child! poor innocent! He cut her throat – there and then!"

"Kobyssu!"

"He did – there and then," said Kobyssu, the deep anger in his

eyes again, and his teeth glinting under his mustache. He clenched his fist and shook it at the floor. "He did," he repeated, "and he did more. That the scent of much blood might bring the wolves, who would hide his crime, he hacked her body – ah-h!" Kobyssu blew out his breath and drummed his fingers agitatedly on his knees.

So this was what the stove, that Djira's father tended, reminded Kobyssu of. As it was fact, not fiction, I did not want to hear anything further; and yet, I felt I must know what happened to the villain, Sturl. I said so, and added in dismay: "Kobyssu! You don't have capital punishment in Czergona, do you?"

"No," he answered, with a peculiar inflection of his voice. "The wolves did not get Djira," he went on. "We young men of Raebrudafisk reached her first. For a boy saw what Sturl did and ran to tell us. He ran for his life, since Sturl had caught sight of him and was chasing him. Sturl could not overtake him, and turned in another direction when he perceived the lad would gain the village.

"Yes, we went to Djira; and then we and the men of the countryside sought Sturl. Many among us vowed to slay him when we came upon him, but the pastor and Schoolmaster Wiec, who was the magistrate of the district, sternly forbade this.

"For over two weeks, in wild weather of sleet and bitter winds. we hunted vainly – scouring woods, climbing to the niches in the mountaintops, and even searching our coal mine, to which we thought the piercing cold might have driven Sturl. We wondered how he obtained food, and at every step we took amid the trees or up the rocks we expected to discover him dead from exposure.

"You can conceive and pity Uflio this while. I consider that his lot was worse than Djira's. She, the one earthly gladness of his blind life; she, the bright, the gentle, whose lips and hands caressed him so lovingly, whose greeting voice woke him in the morning, whose voice told him the hues of the sky and the promise of the garden; she – held by a foul hand and

slaughtered. That is what he had to think of. Small wonder that for days the torment made him almost insane, and that our womenfolk could give him no consolation.

"The Sunday after the murder he did not go to church, being too ill and weak. On the following Thursday, however, when there was an evening service, he took up his routine, and the stove was glowing when we entered the church. It was sad indeed to look at Uflio, in his usual seat, but bent and tremulous, with his cheeks so sunken and ghastly that he was scarcely to be recognized. Perhaps it was saddest to notice the coal smears and a tiny gleam of oil on his hands when he raised them. Little Djira had always been most careful to wipe them for him ere service began.

"As I said, for over two weeks we searched for Sturl; and we found not a trace of him. Then, at dawn one morning, our village was roused by a new alarm. The village of Phyamu, four miles away, where they find and store oil, was on fire. Schoolmaster Wiec wanted every man of us to hurry across and aid the Phyamu people. I had broken my arm two days previously – seeking Sturl. To witness the blaze, however, I set out with the rest. My chum, Vavik Rista, I, and a dozen others, we took a path which went by the church. Although it rose steply we began to cover it at a trot. We had gone a hundred yards past the church when a man, his clothes fluttering in rags, sprang out into the way in front of us, sprang as if from his sleep; and trying to run before either of his feet was well back on the ground, he seemed to wrench one, and fell.

"He was Sturl. Vavik and several more, darting forward instantly, reached him as he came to his knees, and held him.

" 'Lend me a knife,' said Vavik, whom Djira had shown many indications of loving. "But two or three cried, 'No, no; what will the pastor and Schoolmaster Wiec say?' Yet there were others who agreed with Vavik, and it was a long time before we could quiet them.

" 'And all this while Phyamu is burning, and we are needed!" cried someone. He pointed to the thin, strong ropes many were

carrying to the scene of the fire. 'Tie the beast to a tree until we come back.'

" 'Wolves', objected someone else.

" 'So much the better!' shouted Vavik.

"But a voice suggested leaving Sturl in the church, and thither we dragged him. "We bound him, meaning to let him lie on the floor. Seeing him gnash with his teeth at the ropes about him, and knowing him to be so supple that he might stretch and gnaw through some, we gagged him very firmly; so that, though he was raging at us, the sounds he made were but as the hiss of the wind about the church. Then he began to roll and knock his head against the floor.

" 'We must make him fast to something,' said one of us.

"We stared around the church. There were no pillars; there seemed nothing to lash Sturl to. And then Hronk Nalti, the chairmaker, pointed to the stove. " 'Stand him on that. Tie him to the pipe.'

"We did so, fetching a ladder and a high bench from the vestry. We pressed Sturl against the pipe and bound him tightly to it; and in a hard spirit, for which we might be forgiven, we bound him more than was necessary. We swathed and swathed him with rope until nearly all was used. With the last length, since he made an attempt to beat his head against the pipe, we bound that also, passing the rope thrice across his brow and around the pipe, thus forcing the back of his skull immovably against the iron.

"Then we hastened to Phyamu.

"You will observe that I have said 'we' in all this. It is right that I should, as I was of the party. But the work was not the sort for a man with a fractured arm, so that throughout I was an onlooker. Justifiably or not, I find relief in the knowledge of this.

"We hastened, as I said, to Phyamu.

"Keeping together, for no particular reason except that we arrived together late, and telling none that we had captured Sturl, because we were jeered at for our tardiness, we started to roll casks of oil to safety. I helped with one hand, and time was

passing, when suddenly Hrok straightened his back and flung out his arms stiffly, uttering a queer gurgling groan.

"It is Sunday morning!' he said.

"It took us not a second to realize his meaning. We saw Sturl, a figure of rope, stiff and upright like some strange soldier, on the stove in the church at Raebrudafisk – Sturl, incapable of movement, incapable of sound save such as the wind was making. We saw the church door slowly open and Uflio – stone-blind Uflio – appear. We saw him go to the vestry and emerge with fagots, paper, and coal. We saw him arrange the fuel in the stove, utterly unconscious of Sturl, although his fingers would approach to within a few inches of the wretch's feet whenever he manipulated the flap at the top. We saw him bring a bottle of oil from his pocket, soak the fuel, and light it.

"It was all in our minds' eyes, as it were, but I'm sure we all saw this scene as clearly as if we had had an actual vision. And then we felt the sensations of Sturl, the terror which seized him as he perceived what was to come, the leap of hope which his heart would give when Uflio's hands came near him, the frenzy of awful despair which beset him as he strained and strained to loosen a limb or to shift the gag with his tongue. We felt the first slight warmth to the soles of his feet. We felt the pipe against the back of his head, and the slow sure heating of the pipe . . . We saw and felt all these things instantaneously, as it were; and, far faster than we had run to Phyamu, we ran from it, toward our church – all except Vavik, who continued his work."

"No more!" I said, standing up. But Kobyssu really was in the past now; he did not hear me, and instead of walking out of earshot, I remained, dazed.

"I was speedy of leg," said Kobyssu, "and, though I could swing only one arm, I led the way with Hrok. We were not certain what time it was; we believed there was no chance of saving Sturl; yet, in case there might be, we tore along. Our earliest glimpse of the church showed me smoke blowing from the chimney. As to Sturl, having been discovered well, presently we made out Uflio sitting quietly by Djira's grave, and the pastor and some of the womenfolk coming up through the

firs from the village with no sign of excitement. Still we ran, ran through the churchyard, ran to the church door. Hrok opened it, and the hot air from inside met me. There was a reek of smouldering hemp, just like that of the string you allowed to smolder, only much more powerful; and following it was another reek —"

"Stop!" I yelled; and I shook Kobyssu roughly by the shoulder. Then I sat down, feeling indubitably faint. "You'd better give me a drink, Kobyssu," I said. "I might have stood it in print, but to hear you tell it, you who were a witness —"

"And yet," I said, when I was recovering, "I can't help referring to the matter once — once only though. Something strikes me as curious. You said the Uflio's perception was uncanny. In that case I consider it strange that a palpitating human being should have been within six inches of him, and he gave no inkling of the fact."

Kobyssu, who had gone white again toward the finish of the tale, had brought a measure of brandy for himself, and this he drained before replying.

"I will tell you," he said, "a detail that was seen only by Hrok and another, who cut down the - the remains, and by me; for Hrok wiped the face very quickly. . . . For a number of years Sturl had borne on his left cheek a scar, a large puckered scar that stood out from the rest of the flesh. Sturl's face, when Hrok lowered him, was wrought on by the heat, yet some peculiar marks were still visible on the left cheek. They were little stripes, apparently a mingling of oil and coal dust, such as might have been made by the fingers of, let us say, a blind person who sought, by feeling for the scar, to satisfy himself as to the identity of the man he had discovered on the stove."

THE CELLAR ROOM

by Steffan B. Aletti

STEFFAN B. ALETTI first came to our readers' attention in the July 1968 (No. 22) issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, where his first tale, *The Castle in the Window*, was very well received. His second, *The Eye of Horus*, triumphed over such competition as H. P. Lovecraft and David H. Keller, to win first place in the November (No.24) issue, and his third story, *The Last Work of Pietro of Apono* (MOH May 1969, No.27) was also a winner. We hope we have given him worthy competition this time—as we believe we did before.

I AM WRITING THIS in an effort to throw some light on the recent chain of appalling murders. I have no real evidence to offer; nothing more than prior knowledge of the existence of a dangerous creature loose in London, and a reluctant familiarity with its habits.

There have been to date seven murders. Four victims were women, two of them elderly, two fairly young; of the other three, two were nondescript business men, the third an officer investigating the screams of one of these victims. All of these crimes took place in particularly dark places, and all were within a short distance of 12 Cannington Lane, Chelsea.

These crimes do not seem to have sexual overtones, and are unique and traceable to a single source purely because of their appalling ferocity. In each case the victim was ripped apart, though absence of toothmarks would seem to suggest that the monster is a human one. I say humanoid. It is no madman ranging the streets at night, acting out his sexual fantasies as was the celebrated ripper of a generation ago. I feel sure that it is a specie of creature that lies just beyond the measure of human

existence and knowledge. The police will not give me the hearing that I deserve; after the "multiple murders" of Sir Harold Wolverton and his manservant, the police would rather not hear from me. If that affair had received the press coverage it deserved (owing to the importance of the victim and the affluence of his heirs, as well as the recent conclusion of the Boer War, journalists completely ignored it), I feel that a number of perceptive people would have drawn the same conclusion that I offer you now.

I had become reasonably famous; I was by no means Britain's best known or most influential psychical researcher – "ghost hunter" in common parlance – but I had done a good deal of work for the Society for Psychical Research, the College of Psychical Sciences, and the Marylebone Spiritual Society. I had had several monographs published, had written a book on Spiritualism, and produced a number of pamphlets describing my stays in various so-called haunted houses.

Sir Harold Wolverton had once been the president of the Royal College; at that time he was the most respected of the gentlemen engaging in the pursuit of that not-so-respectable science. His papers were widely held to be the most sane and scientifically accurate to come out of the ranks of the Spiritualists. Indeed, at that time Sir Harold was the only one of the brotherhood well enough thought of to appear in public without being heckled by closed minds unfortunately harnessed to big mouths.

It was about 1885 that a very mysterious tragedy occurred. Sir Harold, then not yet knighted, had been about to marry a young lady of good birth, by name Jessica Turner – a relative, as a matter of fact, of the artist. She died under most mysterious circumstances, and Sir Harold disbanded his group, the Chelsea Spiritualist Society, and retired from public life. As that was a very exciting time of Empire, the news did not long dwell on the affair, and, in time, all was forgotten.

Last week, however, I received, to my great surprise, a letter from Sir Harold, inviting me to his residence at Cannington Lane. I lost no time in answering, and found myself a short time later

in a carriage threading its way through the winding streets of Chelsea.

I was shocked to see Sir Harold. Naturally, we are all used to seeing the photographs of him in his prime, heavychested, his great shock of red hair flowing over his ears and joining his bristly mustache, and puffing majestically on a massive Oom Paul. He looked the very essence of the British gentleman. I was perfectly aware, of course, that the photographs had been taken about twenty years earlier, but I did not expect the course of time to have exacted so many ravages. His face was bare, and his head had a sparse tonsure of whispy white. He had a shawl wrapped about his knees, and sat in a wheelchair. His thick hands shook with palsy, and his eyes, once his most commanding feature, were vacant and rheumy. He was forty years old at the time of his fiancee's tragic death: he could now be no more than in his late fifties. He looked like a man of eighty.

"I have decided," he said, watching his servant back out of the room, closing the partition doors behind him, "to publish my diaries for the years 1884 and 1885. They end the night Jessica, my fiancee died. Will you handle the arrangements for me?"

"Of course, Sir Harold," I replied, "but surely there are others who arrange such things professionally; they would be more clever in these matters than I. I myself work through a literary agent."

"I have chosen you," he interrupted, "for several reasons." He wheeled himself feebly over to the bookcase, impatiently gesturing me down when I stood to offer my help. He took two handsomely bound books from a shelf, and wheeled back to the table, throwing them down. They sent up an impressive quantity of dust, arguing their antiquity.

"First," he continued, "you are presumably a researcher. As a scientist, you must see that these are published as records of scientific experiments. They must not be taken as fiction or romance. They are serious and not to be taken lightly. Second, I presume that you are a gentleman. There are obviously, as in any diary, allusions to certain private matters that are to be deleted before publication. You will, I trust, see to it?"

"You may be sure," I replied; "but why, if I may ask, are you planning to release these diaries after all these years if they contain valuable scientific matter?"

Sir Harold remained silent for a few moments. At length, when the silence had begun to be painful, he spoke. "You are getting too close. You fellows think that what you are doing is new and exciting, but let me assure you that we here at the Chelsea Society had done it all 15 years ago. We, too, were scientists; and like you, we toyed with things we were not properly equipped to handle. And you people are about to make the same mistakes that we did."

"Mistakes!" I protested. "I beg to differ. We are indeed on the verge of bridging the gap between the living and the dead, of piercing the veil." I could hear my voice mounting with excitement. "But be sure, Sir Harold, we are doing so with the most modern scientific methods and all possible precautions."

"Balderdash!' he shouted with ferocity I wouldn't have expected from such a fragile-looking old man. "Don't prattle to me about your 'scientific methods'. If you go to the Pole to explore, you take along an overcoat and a bottle of brandy. That's scientific! If you go digging about in Egypt, you take along a fan and a bottle of gin. That's scientific! But what, sir, what possible precautions can you take against the unseen and the totally unknown? Don't you realize the tremendous power and raw forces of evil you can invoke by accident? What precautions do you take against these sir? A raincoat? A gun? Or a cross? Believe me, sir, if there is a God, He waits until you are dead before he enters the picture. The devil is not so polite!"

I had stood during that tirade, for no man can speak to me in that manner. It was no longer the 19th century! He spoke again as I picked up my cane.

"Please sit down, sir; I'm sorry to have shouted." He once again appeared to be a docile, harmless old man. It was a complete physical change.

"Very well," I returned, assuming an air of wounded dignity. "But you'll have to explain the entire business before I continue. I feel that our experiments have proven that we have nothing to

fear from the darkness beyond the grave save our own superstitions and physical limitations. What I have learned through mediums is that the spirits beyond us want to help us, to teach us that we need not fear death, but should consider it as the parting of a curtain that has obscured our eyes during our earthly life." I sat down, pleased with my pretty speech, and rested my walking stick between my knees. The light was now waning, as it was mid-winter, and with the oncoming dark came a palpable chill.

"Very well," said Sir Harold. He wheeled himself to the liquor cabinet and withdrew two sherry glasses. After pouring a rather large measure of the amber liquid into each of them, he offered me the larger portion. I took it and began to sip it, observing a connoisseur's silence, a respectful pause before commenting on the wine.

"Excellent sherry," I said, falling short of poetry, but I was anxious for Sir Harold to begin his story.

"Yes," he answered, staring at his glass absentmindedly, "It's old." He turned it around in his hand for a few moments, watching the light catch its color.

"In December, 1884," he began quietly, "the Chelsea Spiritualist Society was formed. It consisted of Jessica, my fiancee; Thomas Walters, a novelist; Dr. Edmund Vaughan, a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, and myself. At first we simply tracked down local Spiritualists and bade them come to my house; we had the cellar arranged with a large table and five chairs. The mediums, famous for remarkable feats within their own houses, provided very little of interest when taken away from their rigs, pulleys, and secret compartments. No ghosts, no spirits, no disembodied trumpets floating about in the air. But some of these so-called Spiritualists did seem to possess a certain kind of . . . sensitivity shall we call it? They seemed to feel something in the cellar – and what is more remarkable, most of them expressed it in the same way: They felt a malignancy, a dark, angry thing that lived, or perhaps I should say, existed in the cellar.

At first we felt nothing, simply darkness. But as we conducted these seances, most of us – Walters being the sole exception – began to feel a physical oppression that could not be attributed to simple fear of the dark or, for that matter, the power of suggestion. Once, just before we lost Jessica, Vaughan and I were trying automatic writing, when the lamp suddenly went out. There had been no wind; the door is heavy oak, bolted shut, so there could have been no draft moving through the room. Afterward we found the lamp easily three-quarters full, and the wick in perfect condition. But the lamp went out, and we sat in that total blackness before the eye accustoms itself to the shadows. I felt almost immediately a sense of overwhelming blackness – not darkness, mind you, but blackness, and worse, a sense of hate. There was something in the room that was projecting a furious driving hate, aimed possibly at me or Vaughan or both of us, but I felt at humanity – the living in general.

"I was overwhelmed, suffocated by this malignancy now coupled with a mounting terror in myself. I tried to move, but found it wholly impossible and in desperation, trying to sound perfectly normal, I told Vaughan to light the lamp. He whispered, or I should rather say that he gasped that he could not. It was at this point that we both realized that we were in danger – just what kind of danger we were not sure then. And we just sat there all night, the two of us huddled together, shivering from terror and the cold. At length, as dawn began to penetrate the opaque glass of the cellar windows, we both found the strength to stir; as the sun began to warm the air outside, we burst out of the room, red-eyed and thoroughly frightened.

"Vaughan and I made our trembling way upstairs, and he resigned from the Society over a stiff glass of brandy.

"I think it was then that I first realized that I had some sort of mediumistic talent in me – or at least I knew that Vaughan or I or both of us possessed it. Despite the fright it gave me, I continued my work, and the Chelsea Society's work. We investigated, held seances, table taps and whatnot, with a

moderate amount of success, but never with anything like the results that night with Vaughan. Then I held my last seance.

"We had decided to hold a seance just before Christmas. It was an icy cold night, and I distinctly remembered that the shadows of icicles hanging in front of the cellar windows made irregular striped patterns on the floor and table. They looked like prison bars. It was late perhaps 11:30 or 12:00, and all was deathly still – complete silence, broken now and then by a horse's trot or a tinkling sleigh bell.

"There were five of us that night: Jessica, whom I was to marry just after the new year, Walters, and two of our new members, one a student – Cambridge I think – named Wilson, who was home from the holiday, and a young scientist of sorts named Tice. I remember just before the seance began, we all had a drink to toast the new year, since this was expected to be the last time we would see each other for several weeks. It was, I believe the last happy moment I have had in my life. I remember especially Jessica, sitting directly across the table from me. Her blonde hair was done up in a bun, and she wore a topaz choker I had just given her as an early Christmas present. Then young Wilson blew out the light and we began.

"Almost immediately, the room began to take on a stuffy feeling, as if it were getting somehow smaller and closer. I experienced a kind of dizzy sensation, and I began to think that I had had perhaps a swallow too many of the sherry we used for the toast. But I quickly realized that it wasn't a simple inebriate dizziness, because my senses were all fully acute. I let my head fall back, and allowed my neck to rest on the back of the chair while I began to perspire. After a few minutes I heard a few gasps and I opened my eyes. To my indescribable horror I saw that I was partially illuminated by a bright substance which seemed to be smeared over my face. My first thought, of course, was to wipe it away, but I found myself once again powerless to move. I simply sat there while this substance – presumably ectoplasm – dripped all over me, coming, I was told later, out of my mouth. It felt sticky, and with each moment I felt weaker.

"The room was, of course, getting brighter as the glow of this

infernal material got stronger; eventually the stuff began to float in the air, slowly, I fancied, assuming a shape. At first it was indistinct, just a round mass; then it gradually began to—how shall I describe it? fall together, brighter and darker areas falling together to create a face—a large, round face. It hung in the air for what seemed like several minutes probably not much more than a couple of seconds—until it was perfectly clear. It was round and hairless, with great closed eyes. It seemed like a corpse laid out on view, pale and serene, yet there was something about the structure of the fact that suggested something less than human. Its nose was flat with wide nostrils, and its lips -if it had any—were drawn back to reveal great, craggy teeth, wholly unpleasant to see.

"As we watched it hover above us, the gelatinous white substance began to form something of a body – long, gaunt, yet somehow suggestive of great power. Then, slowly, the lids began to raise, revealing, God help me, great green eyes, pupiless, malevolent and terrifying. We could not be sure that it saw anything, whether it looked upon us or not, but I – and I was later to find out, the rest of them – felt that it did indeed behold us. Then, all at once, the horrible mouth opened and the room was filled with a great whispering sound like a distant waterfall. Gradually the sound grew, until its intensity was deafening. It was at that point that I fainted.

"I was revived later by Tice. I was lying on the cellar steps, my clothes torn. Tice was bloody and bruised, and Walters had gone to get an ambulance. Jessica and young Wilson were dead.

"Later, in the hospital, I was told by Walters that the thing had begun to move awkwardly at first, with sort of a swaying motion – then with agility and finally speed. First it simply ranged about the room – Tice described it as looking as if it were trying to get out – then, as the roaring increased, a great wind began to whirl about, knocking over the ash trays and unlit lamp on the table. By this time, everyone was up out of their seats and trying to get out of the rooms themselves, though Tice said that Jessica tried to get to me through the maelstrom. The last that both Tice and Walters remembered was that creature actually

grabbing at them. They managed to get the door open, and, with what must have been superb bravery, repeatedly went back to pull the rest of us out. They both concurred that after dragging me out, they could not find Wilson, and Jessica was obviously beyond help.

"Wilson was later found, crushed under the marble table which had been literally flipped across the room to land legs up in the opposite corner from which it had stood. Jessica was crushed beyond recognition. I obtained leave from the hospital to attend her funeral, and the casket was closed. After the service I had prevailed upon the undertaker to open it. There hasn't been one moment since then that I haven't regretted that request; she was smashed to a pulp — nothing but a mass of bruises and lacerations; all semblance of facial bone structure had entirely disappeared. The sight so shocked me that I fainted, and was taken to the hospital again, this time for a stay of several months."

The old man finished his drink with a gulp, and stared down at his lap. "The Chelsea Society was disbanded, of course; and the Cellar Room shut. I never really regained my health; some part of me, some vitality was drained from me, and for all I know, it still may be down there, waiting for release."

Sir Harold sat back in his wheelchair, apparently exhausted with the effort of dredging up such horrible memories and relating them, perhaps for the first time, to another human being. I moved in my seat sluggishly; it was completely dark outside now, and the room was quite chilly.

"My dear Sir Harold," I murmured, trying to console the old gentleman, "that is a frightful story." I did not really believe the story, yet I did not doubt his sincerity; I believed that *he* believed it. I began to question tactfully.

"Perhaps a good deal of this was a . . . subjective occurrence — that is a hallucination of sorts rather than a literal, physical happening.?"

Sir Haorld jolted upright in his seat, eyeing me with a hot ferocity again out of character with his physical weakness. "You doubt my story?"

"Oh not at all," I hastened to assure him, "But you yourself admit that you were unconscious during most of the physical activity. Possibly Tice and Walters . . "

"Tice and Walters were gentlemen," he interrupted. "I do not doubt their testimony. It was sworn later at a private inquest. Tice is now dead, and Walters left for South America about a decade ago, and is out of touch." He looked directly at me in an unmistakable challenge. "Is it proof you want?"

I cleared my throat. "Well, I should like to be positive that the material that I'm to release to the public is valid. I imagine that a man of your reputation would be of the same mind. Look at it from a point of law: the evidence you present is really no more than hearsay." I warmed to my argument. "Without Walters or Tice to corroborate your story, critics both within and without the Spiritualist camp would make a laughingstock of you." I stopped, afraid I'd gone a bit too far. The old man's temper was still healthy.

"What do you want as proof at this rather late date?' he asked.

"A seance," I replied. "We must prove to the world that there is a daemonic force in the cellar. Let me get a group of Spiritualists fromthe Marylebone Society here and the results will either prove or disprove . . . "

"No. No groups," he said calmly. "You want the proof, and I can furnish it. There need be no more than the two of us. I want no repetition of the last debacle. Two deaths per seance is enough."

"But I did not mean to suggest that you conduct it, Sir Harold," I said, astonished that the old man would be willing to relive that experience "You must consider your age and health."

"Neither are important to me. Besides, I am the agent of the creature; I think that it needs me to manifest itself. It got half of me last time; this time it can have the rest, or give me back that part that it has. Either way, I'll be satisfied."

I don't know why I agreed to it; curiosity, for the most part, though, not to my credit, I must admit that the thought of the impending notoriety — whatever the outcome — excited me. I really did believe that little or nothing would happen, and that

the great neurotic burden with which Sir Harold had lived might be lifted when he realized that it had all been his imagination or the fancy of Tice and Walters. I forgot to consider the deaths of Jessica and the student. At any rate, we decided to hold the seance that night.

SIR HAROLD LIT ANOTHER LAMP and beckoned me to begin pushing. Slowly and laboriously, for it is not an easy thing to let a man in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs gently, we began to make our way, the lamp throwing a dancing light down the mahogany panelling of the walls. The immense silence was broken by the dissonance of the large, hard rubber wheels of the clumsy chair.

At length we arrived at the bottom of the steps. The first part of Wolverton's story was clearly true. There had been no one down these steps for a very long time, for, glancing behind me, I could clearly see my footprints and the wheelchair's odd, snaking lines in the dust.

I took the lamp from Sir Harold and held it at the cellar door. It was bolted and nailed shut with large boards crossed over it, the way they bar access to condemned buildings. The wood of the door had split where the nails had entered, so it was no difficult matter to pull the boards off and pull open the bolt.

Once inside the room, I wheeled Sir Harold to the far end of the table. It was, indeed, a large heavy table; it and the room were laden with dust. Clearly no one had been in that room for a long time. Other than the accumulated dust, the room had a perfectly normal appearance, though two chairs were lying on their sides by the windows. Without speaking, Sir Harold placed the lamp on the table and leaned back, signaling for me to begin. I made myself comfortable, wiping away the dust on the seat and arms of my chair. I sat back and asked once more whether he was sure that we should go ahead.

"Positive," he said.

I blew out the light. In the resulting darkness I saw nothing, though after a few minutes I could barely make out the bent figure across the table. Sir Harold let his head fall back, his neck

resting against the wicker back of the wheelchair. His mouth slowly sagged open, exposing a set of teeth complete but misshapen and tobacco-stained; his eyes remained open, but with a chillingly sightless aspect. I sat facing him for what must have been close to forty-five minutes until I noticed that his breathing had apparently stopped. I immediately feared for the old man's life—the terrible memories—real to him—might have given him a heart seizure. Then, in the dim cellar light, he began to exude an odd pale yellow glow. I looked behind me to see opaque windows; the glow was not coming from them. I began to feel an overwhelming fear. I had sat through numberless seances given by the most reputable mediums in the world, yet I never got so much as a tingle of fear. Now I was streaming with perspiration, my eyes nailed to the strange, bent form in front of me.

As I looked at him, I perceived a milky-white, viscous substance formlessly building up like mucous in his nostrils and mouth. Fascinated, I watched as it began to flow noiselessly out of his nose and mouth and down his lips and chin. It gave off its own glow, a rhythmically pulsating light the quality of which was similar to lights seen from a great distance underwater. As the ectoplasmic substance glowed, I noticed that rather than lighting the room, it darkened it. Whereas certain objects, especially the broken chairs under the window, had been quite bright, they now darkened to the point where the only visible things in the room were Sir Harold's face and shoulders, neck and shirt front, and a few inches of the table.

By now I fully regretted the entire affair. Whereas in the light, with sherry in hand, stories of great green monsters are absolutely ridiculous, they begin to get less and less amusing as the light wanes. I have seen many a seance break down with the turning out of the light; but I am a professional and, presumably, used to such things.

Yet I had never felt a room to be so laden with evil, and with the tension of something about to happen. It must be very similar to the feeling experienced by a soldier awaiting a bombardment he knows is to come at any time.

The darkness now lay on me palpably, a damp blanket that caused the windows, chilled with the cold night air, to run with

moisture. Sir Harold was now the only visible thing in the room. His eyes were still open, sightless it would seem, though I could see his hands wringing furiously in his lap. He was undoubtedly awake, and terrified at reliving that experience that had resulted in several deaths and his retirement from public life.

The viscous substance exuding from his nostrils and mouth was now joining and producing a mass of sizeable bulk that lay directly between the two of us; and as I watched it, very unpleasantly thrilled, it began to form a roughly spheroid shape, a shape that I was fervently hoping would not become a head. As, however, it began to do so, I began to marshal my efforts to shake off the fascination that bound me to my seat. I realized now that Sir Harold's story was true, and that I had best do all in my power to prevent a full repetition of the affair.

Perhaps you have had dreams in which you were in danger, usually not specified, but somehow assumed by you to be mortal; and movement is impossible. Often this same physical paralysis attends psychic phenomena—and so it did with me, and, I assume, Sir Harold. We were bound by some agent either within or without us, to sit and watch as that creature began to take form, to flow out of Sir Harold's body, or perhaps his mind.

In any case, the head was now forming: it was large, about twice the size of a human head, I should say, while very melon-shaped. It was supported by a column of pulsating ectoplasm, under which was beginning to appear the rudiments of a body—a long tubular shape with what seemed to be long, thin arms and legs. In all, the form was humanoid, but quite definitely not human, not in shape, and not in intent.

The face was now forming. It was perfectly smooth, unstamped by any of the expression lines that mark creatures of feelings. It was clearly not a ghost in the conventional sense: it was indeed a spirit—that is a creature that exists on a plane other than our own—but in this case a spirit that never was human; it was an elemental, a spirit that perhaps populated Earth before humanity, and that resents us as usurpers.

With a tremendous effort I succeeded in pushing my chair back slightly from the table. It squeaked over the dirty floor, and

the sound rather enabled me to shake off some of the stupor that ennerved me.

"Sir Harold," I managed to whisper, "Sir Harold, you must move."

He made a visible effort to move—I could see his hands rise to the table and feebly push against it, without effect. He then made a sort of shrugging movement with his shoulders and shook his hands.

Dripping with sweat, I began to lean across the table in an effort to get at the lamp and light it. It was too far away, and, as leaning forward brought me closer to the thing hovering now almost fully formed above the table, I shrank back in my seat. It would only be a matter of moments before it would break away from Sir Harold with a malevolent life of its own. I knew that we needed light. I reached into my vest pocket and withdrew my matchbox. Fumbling, I dropped one or two matches before I succeeded in lighting one. I held it up as it flared, bringing the room briefly into view. The creature seemed to dissipate, and the features that had been strongly apparent began to melt back into the mass of ecotplasm. As the match began to flicker the creature once more began to fill out, making me realize that the matches did not throw enough light to destroy it, merely to stave off its complete formation. And I could not have had more than five or so matches left. As the match went out, I immediately lit another, with the same effect. I was only putting off the inevitable. In a desperate gamble, I decided to light all at once inside the box; during the longer brighter flame, I would try to get to the door.

Lighting the match in my hand, I put it inside the box, letting it rest against its corner. As the box itself began to burn, I pushed it carefully under the writhing mid-air figure, which knew now, if it commanded any intelligence at all, that there were agents working for its destruction.

As the matches remaining in the box flared, I found my legs and bolted for the door, unlocked it, and made my way upstairs.

Once at the landing I shouted for the old servant, who came running out of the back with a dressing gown on.

"Good Heavens, what is it sir?" he asked, no doubt shocked at my appearance and the desperate manner in which I had called him.

"Light a lamp quickly man, and come with me!" He did so, admirably quickly, I must say, for a man his age.

We both ran downstairs, I at the quicker pace. As I reached the bottom, the light carried by the servant was already spilling into the darkened room. I could not resist peering in it was quite dark, though I could make out Sir Harold, still seated at the head of the table, in the same position I had left him. There was no ectoplasm to be seen. I breathed with relief; we had beaten it!

At length the old servant ambled up to me with the lamp. We both entered the room, I first, setting the lamp on the table.

I shall never forget the sight of Sir Harold. Despite the subsequent controversy, I never doubted that it was other than Sir Harold; at first the police believed me only because of the total lack of anything else that could be Sir Harold.

What sat before me was barely more than a skeleton. Its skin was stretched tightly to the bones, and its eyes were shrunken out of sight into their sockets. Sir Harold's clothes hung loosely on the frame, and the hands that I had seen writhing in that lap only minutes before, were now still, bony hands that would belong under normal circumstances to the long dead.

I involuntarily stepped back in horror, bumping into the servant who was muttering. "It can't be, it can't be," he whispered, largely to himself.

I realized now that the demon had been able to materialize, but only at Sir Harold's expense, and that it took sustenance not only from his mind and spirit, but from his body as well; every drop of ectoplasm that flowed from Sir Harold was a drop of his own life's substance flowing out from him. That would explain why he was a shattered man after the first materialization, though his wounds were not so great as to account for the physical deterioration. But now, facing Sir Harold's skeletal remains, I realized that his death could mean only one thing: the creature's life!

I began to shake again, in the realization that that horrid thing

must now be alive in that room. I grabbed the lamp and held it high, peering into the shadows of the far corners of the room.

The servant apparently gathered what I was about, and made quickly for the door.

"Don't open it," I shouted. "You'll let it out." I was wrong.

There in the hall, standing just beyond the lip of light cast by the lamp I was holding, was the creature. It was a sort of mottled yellow colour, perhaps cream–it's hard to tell in the glow of a lamp—with blotches of a non-descript darker colour. It stood about eight or nine feet in height, and had a perfectly round head with no ears, long spindly arms that looked as if they might be jointed in two or three places, and huge, bony hands a good foot across. But its most arresting features were its eyes—great holes on either side of a dark spot that I assume could be a nose. And, as Sir Harold had said, they did indeed glow green, a dull, angry green mist that suggested a primordial fury that no man could hope to contain.

Before I could shout for the old man to come back into the circle of light, the creature snatched at him with one of those long, spidery arms, catching him about the middle with a huge hand. The old man gasped once, and then, with an unspeakable crackling sound, the creature literally twisted him apart and then threw his crushed body back into the room at my feet. He lay there, and a widening pool of blood issued from the crumpled body.

The creature eyed me malevolently and began to move closer. I turned to hold the lamp in front of me, and with a sinking heart, realized that it was only about half full, with only enough oil to last a few hours. And I knew that when it would begin to dim, the creature would move closer and closer until it could reach me and snap me in two with those loathsome arms.

Closer and closer it moved, as the time passed and the light flickered. Occasionally it would reach in and flail at me, withdrawing quickly, as the light seemed to give it pain. I sat on the edge of the table, my ears ringing with the preternatural silence and my head reeling from the terror of what I had been through and the fear of the outcome of my current trial. And the

creature stood in the hallway, staring at me, its mouth leering in a wide, craggy grin. But at last, no doubt a matter of minutes before the light was to flicker its last, the dawn began to break, and light began to filter through the opaque windows.

The creature began to move back into the hall, leaving me alone with my two ghastly companions. Knowing that the hall would remain dark throughout the day, I shook off my terror and fatigue and, possessed of the excess energy that we are blessed with at times of trial, I picked up a chair and hurled it through the windows. Clambering onto the table, I cleared the broken glass from the sill, and hoisted myself over it onto the cold ground.

London never looked so wonderful, and its air has never smelled so sweet. The sun had not yet brought warmth, but even at that early hour, I could see men making their way to work, wrapped in mufflers, their breath rhythmically condensing into clouds of steam. Despite my light dress and my dampness from perspiration, I ran down the street shouting for help. When it finally came, I collapsed.

The police certainly expressed reservations about my story, though my shaken condition, and the unspeakable condition of the two corpses found in that God-forsaken room argued eloquently in favour of the truth of my story. The coroner stoutly insisted that Sir Harold had been dead many months, but had to admit that identification, rings, and physical features noted by Sir Harold's physician, proved beyond a doubt that the body was his; and he had been seen as recently as a week earlier by Sir Clive Mathews, Bart., who had stopped by to discuss the sale of some property near Brighton. And I had in my possession, Sir Harold's letter, dated only a few days before the tragic night. Furthermore, the old servant, whose name was Tom, was torn brutally limb from limb, and neither the corner nor the chief of police could imagine what agency would have the power or ferocity to crumple a human being in that savage manner.

So the police reluctantly reported that "Person or persons unknown attacked and murdered Sir Harold Wolverton and his

servant Thomas Cooper for cause unknown." And there's an end on it.

But the creature, that living part of Sir Harold whose full "birth" left that ghastly shell staring at the ceiling of the cellar room, has the run of London, and I am positive that the current wave of murders and maimings can be attributed to it.

I would expect that its quarters are the now empty Wolverton house. It was apparently a simple matter for it to have eluded the police search after the murders; it could have made its way into the attic, or into the wainscoting, or perhaps even underground. Who knows what its powers, capabilities and intelligence are? The Wolverton house is a desirable house in an excellent neighbourhood, but rumours persist about it, and I expect that it shall stand vacant for a long time to come.

The Reckoning

The question, "Did you like the cover?" was accidently omitted from the preference page of our first issue, but this did not deter most of you who wrote in; and I can say that approval was as close to unanimous as I've seen for many a year. While this cover was not drawn to illustrate a story in WTT, it was selected because we felt the picture could tie in well with *The Dead-Alive.*

The winning story, by your votes, did not start out in front, but once arriving there, rather early in the race, it held front position longer than any story which later nosed it out, finally bursting ahead with the very final ballot received before we had to close the polls. Interestingly, the story which received the most first-place votes was not the winner, nor did the story which received the most "dislike" votes come out in last place; the winning story, did, though, receive the largest number of "outstanding" votes. Here's the final positions:

(1) *The Whispering Thing,* Eddie C. Bertin; (2) *The House and the Brain,* Edward Bulwer-Lytton; (3) *He,* H.P. Lovecraft; (4) *The Beast of Averoigne,* Clark Ashton Smith; (5) *Mss. Found in a Bottle,* Edgar Allan Poe; (6) *The Dead-Alive,* Nat Schachner & Arthur L. Zagat; (7) *Dead Legs,* Edmond Hamilton.

Thus the author of a new story comes out ahead, this time as *The Whispering Thing* had not been published in this country before.

THE WHEEL

by H. Warner Munn

The final serial to be completed in *WEIRD TALES* during the tenure of Farnsworth Wright as editor, was *King of the World's Edge*, a tale of Merlin and an expedition to America in Arthurian times (September/December 1939), by H. WARNER MUNN. This was Munn's final appearance in WT; he had been seen there first in the July 1925 issue with *The Werewolf of Ponkert*, which was the first of a series, told from the werewolf's point of view. Outside of the series, we only saw him five times (including the novel mentioned above, which has been reprinted by Ace Books), and one of these is *The City of Spiders* which we ran in the Fall 1967 (No.4) issue of *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*.

THE TALL AMERICAN LOOKED ACROSS the dinner table, with an amused tolerance. "Come, come, Bohorquia! You don't seriously expect me to believe that cock-and-bull story, do you? The idea of a torture chamber in this day and age is preposterous! Especially one in working order as you claim this one is. Own up, now, aren't you kidding me?"

The other, a dark, slight-boned individual, wet his full vividly red lips with a flicking tongue-tip before replying. If he felt annoyance at the rejection of his previous remark, only a hairline narrowing of his eyelids gave proof of his irritation.

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He smiled as he said, "Follow me, Senor Preece, and I will set all your doubts at rest!"

They rose together.

Bohorquia, owner of this secluded hacienda deep in the Sonoran hills, closed and locked both doors leading to the dining-room. "Not every one knows all my little secrets. But to you they shall be open, for I am sure you will not tell. Attend carefully--"

He stooped and pressed against a white stone, set at the right of the fireplace. This apparently released a catch, but it was necessary to press upon two other stones as well, before a panel slid noiselessly upward, disclosing a dark opening in the wall. Now a motto in red letters was seen above this entrance, and Preece read aloud, *"Misericordia et Justitia."*

"The ironic motto of the Inquisition," said Bohorquia. "Come!"

Preece, the burly disbeliever, looked dubiously at the odd doorway; but then with a shrug he followed whither his host had already gone, and the panel slid down. Behind them had been left a locked, quiet and innocent-appearing room; before them a narrow and winding passageway led down like a slanting ramp.

There were no stairs, Preece decided, and then he blinked in a flood of light which streamed down from electric bulbs hung from the roof of the tunnel.

"A fairly recent improvement of my lamented father's," explained Bohorquia, as they walked along. "The power is obtained from a dynamo run by a dammed stream near by. We also have plenty left over to run some simple machines, besides utilizing the water to irrigate my fields. I think you will agree that our system is quite efficient."

Preece was hardly listening. He was wondering why, though there must be quite a number of feet of earth and rock between them and daylight, the air was not cold and dank. Indeed, if anything, the atmosphere seemed charged with a pleasantly pungent and aromatic odor which suggested forests to him and something else which he could not quite identify.

He was still speculating upon this when he observed that the

walls of the tunnel were quite dry, though obviously natural in formation, for in few spots were there any scars of the chisel. Then, before he had time to speak out his curiosity, they turned a corner and entered a large chamber.

This was wholly natural in extent, but had been improved by the hand of man, who had furnished the cavern in a peculiar manner.

It was roughly oval, about a hundred feet long by forty in width, and across the narrow portion of this underground room ran a thick and ponderous bar, almost like an immense drive-shaft for some titanic machine. As though in support of this idea, the shaft, fifteen feet from the floor passed through a wooden wheel, forming its axis.

The rim of the wheel was wide and seemed to be ridged, though Preece could not be certain, owing to a blue haze which obscured the sharp outlines of everything in the cavern and made him cough as well.

About six feet from each side of the hub he noticed that a radiating spoke-like arrangement of stocks or rods was fastened, and he was speculating idly as to their purpose, when he became aware that Bohorquia was addressing him.

Damned nonsense, all this idiotic paraphernalia, but if he was going to get control of those valuable oil lands, he had better seem to pay attention to his host's little idiosyncrasies!

"Sit down, Senor Preece," urged Bohorquia, gesturing toward a low stone bench within easy reach of a system of levers possessing vari-colored handles. Near the wall, they could now hear a rumbling like swiftly rushing water, and Preece surmised that the stream which furnished the power was not far away. Yet no moisture seeped through and the walls were bone-dry.

"If you can spare me a few moments from your business thoughts, Senor Preece, I would like to relate to you a tale which will make clear to you the purpose of this -er—creation in the center of the chamber."

There was an undercurrent in Bohorquia's smooth voice which the American did not like, but he could not tell just why. "Shoot. I'm listening."

He lit a cigar and made as though to throw the burning match upon the cracked brown expanse of level floor which joined the narrow rim of stone, some three feet wide, which ran all around the chamber, but paused. Odd, he hadn't noticed *that* before. Why, that brown stuff must be pavement of some sort. It was the source of that peculiar odor, like hot tar used in fixing the macadam roads.

Bohorquia bent forward and blew out the flame of the match and began his story in an easy tone of unconcern.

"It commenced in the city of Seville, when Philip the Second was king of Spain. Francis Bohorquia, whence I obtain my name, dwelt there under a cloud of suspicion. His wife, a gentle and lovely lady, was of Jewish descent and had moved for years beneath the interested regard of the Inquisition.

"Bohorquia was wealthy, and if even a little proof could be secured to convict this pair of Judaism, the Holy Office would profit.

"But they observed their religious duties faithfully, and regularly attended mass, observing the days of fasting, and gave no cause for complaint; so matters went on for years without any action.

"They had one son, Diego, not of age at the time of which I speak, and this son came home one evening to find none there but emissaries of the Inquisition.

"A chastised servant, smarting from justly deserved punishment, had informed the Procurator Fiscal of many things, mostly lies but well sworn to, and retribution was sure and quick.

"Diego never saw his parents again, but he learned from the guard that brought food to the cell in which he awaited his questioning, that their fate had been sudden and that all was over. Everything had been confiscated, and should he be some day freed, he would be without resources.

"Hardly daring to ask the question, the boy inquired what had been done to his parents.

"The guard replied that it had been designed by the Assessor and the Procurator Fiscal, acting under the orders of the Grand

Inquisitor, that they should be tortured near to death and later burned to ashes at the next following auto-da-fe.

"In pursuance of these orders, the woman had been scourged until senseless as the first torture. She again denied that either she or Francis were of Jewish belief, so she was then racked.

"Remaining stedfast, her right and left arms were clamped into the garrote and wrenched in the harsh metal.

"When she became conscious for the third time, she was asked to tell the truth. She said nothing and the torturer brought out the *trampazo*.

"Do you know what that is, Senor Preece?"

Preece shook his head, fascinated by Bohorquia's manner. His voice had become more animated and little sparks seemed to snap in his black eyes, as the many brilliant lights were reflected there by his quick nods and jerks of his head.

"I will tell you. It was an iron shoe, hinged so it could be opened. They brought it white-hot and clamped it upon her naked foot and chuckled while that delicate woman writhed in torment, her flesh slowly being roasted from her bones. God of the Christians! Yahweh of the Jews! Where were *you* when such things were being done?

"She died.

"They brought out Francis Bohorquia. He was hale and strong before they questioned him. He underwent the *Tormento di Toca*--a thin cloth bound over his mouth and nostrils so that he could hardly breathe, *before* they wet it with a steady stream of water which forced the cloth deep into his throat as he fought for breath.

"It was doubly wet when it was pulled out—with water and with blood.

"He was weaker then, but he defied them and would tell nothing that they wished to know, so they gave him the torture of the Chafing-Dish. This was brought in, full of glowing charcoal, and his feet were greased or basted with lard to cause the heat more quickly to penetrate; then they were held close above the coals.

"When his torturers had finished, his walking days were

forever ended. But he was still stout of heart, so they dislocated his arms with the *strappado,* his legs by the rack, and tortured him to the point of rupture with their devilish Water-Cure.

"He remained silent and went defiant to the stake, knowing that if he once confessed it meant the death of his only son, who he had determined must avenge him, and so sent word by the pitying guard.

"That command has been nearly fulfilled!"

Bohorquia fairly spat out the last words, and Preece felt a prickle of unrest and suspicion which set nerves in his stolid body tingling. Was he penned here in this menacing place with a madman? He coughed. That smoke like burning tar was becoming very irritant.

"Let's go back upstairs," he urged; "we can talk better there."

"Patience, friend," Bogorquia chuckled, "there's a little more for you to hear, and you'll understand it better in this place.

"Diego, the son, was not tortured—much—but was condemned to life as a galley slave; not, you will note, as one convicted, but as one suspected of Judaism.

"His twenty-first birthday was spent in the cells of the Inquisition. He was thirty and brutalized to the heart's core of him when he made a wild break for liberty as the galley glided up the Tagus just after dusk. He had pulled out the staple that fastened his chains—long had he eyed the rotten board which held it—and he caved in the skull of an overseer with the flailing links, blinded another with a back-hand swing and went overboard, racing a pound of leaden and bronze slugs into the water.

"When he came up, he was far downstream, made his way to Lisbon, found a friend that was waiting for him with clothes and a file, and before morning he was off; a stowaway in a carack bound for Rome, whose captain was no friend to Spain.

"Here is where the story finds its point. He came to California, became a rancher and in ten years was wealthy, after a little skilful work with Indians who had gold, furs or anything which was of value. Somehow Diego always had it before long, and then—always searching for the right place -he came down to

Sonora, stumbled upon this natural cavern and made it over to suit his fancy, much as you see it now.

"The natives were his workmen, they built this hacienda over the only entrance to the cave, built the wheel, the dam to furnish power for its turning, dug out the foundations and filled the pit that remained with pitch.

"Yes, Senor Preece, it is a lake of pitch which you have been so curiously inspecting. It is four feet deep within a circle of twenty feet in all directions around the wheel and seven feet deep everywhere else, *except* in front of one of these two stone benches you see.

"There is a stone block four feet square and six feet high, sunken in the pitch, but I shall not tell you if it is in front of the bench upon which we sit or before the one directly across from this, within jumping distance from that drive-shaft, assuming that a strong man could run out upon that turning slippery rod far enough to be able to jump at all. *Why* should he jump? Patience!

"Nineteen years is a long time which to think and plan of vengeance. Diego took three years more to get this retreat built to his liking and then sailed again for Spain. No one knew this middle-aged man traveling under an assumed name, and bearded and bronzed he was safe from recognition.

"He wanted to find five men:

"The informer against his parents.

"The torturer.

"The Procurator Fiscal.

"The Assessor.

"The Grand Inquisitor.

"The Grand Inquisitor he caused to be assassinated by a hired bravo. The Procurator Fiscal and the Assessor, he learned, were somewhere in the Americas, but the torturer and the informer he took into his employ at a wage which meant riches to them and brought them home. And home was here!

"One night the informer went to sleep, drugged, and awoke bound lightly so that he could readily untie himself, but he was upon the wheel. With his first motion the wheel began to move.

"Swiftly as he might climb, the wheel kept even pace with his

efforts, while down below the melted bubbling pitch waited, hungry for him, heated hotter and hotter by five roaring furnaces deep under this cavern with iron plates set in this floor above them! There was no rest for him, for the wheel never stopped; the waterfall saw to that, although the speed might be regulated at this spectator's bench, where Diego sat and gloated over the pleadings of the man who had watched with a grin on his lips when others suffered. He pointed out to the informer that it would not be wise to stop climbing; for if he once touched the pitch and was still able to bear the pain, the sticky liquid would weight down his clothes until he could not climb and eventually would be driven frantic by repeated immersions and would fall the sooner into his inevitable resting-place. You will notice that the under edge of the wheel is only a few inches above the surface of the pitch, which naturally rises as it is heated."

"By heaven! Bohorquia, I'll not stay here another minute, I'm stifling in this heat!" Preece mopped his face with a big red bandanna and scowled. "You and your great-great-grandfather – bosh! This is all nonsense. If that guy had had the guts of a rabbit, he would have jumped off into that pitch and ended it all quick. Any *man* would! Let's go upstairs."

Bohorquia's eyes glittered oddly. "Do you really think so, my friend? The informer did not jump! He rode that wheel for a full day and a half, before he became unconscious for lack of rest and could no longer hold on.

"The torturer was of different mettle. He was only upon the wheel for a couple of hours, when he ran out upon the revolving shaft and almost reached the stonework before he fell into the pitch. He came up once, so I have been told, blubbering and moaning as the heat struck in, and he died there only a foot from the edge of the stones, unable to move an arm in the clinging sticky stuff. You see, he guessed at the position of the hidden rock a foot beneath the surface, but he did not guess rightly. The situation must have been quite edifying to Diego, who remembered very well what the guard had told him of the atrocities which this man had inflicted upon his parents; don't you think so, Senor Preece?"

A sullen stare was tl.e only reply.

"To prevent the danger of a man escaping entirely, Diego fixed that arrangement of keen-edged swords you see about six feet along upon the shaft. No one has been able to leap over that and keep his footing upon the other side—yet! Diego never found the Procurator Fiscal or the Assessor, and fearing that his vengeance would be incomplete, he bred a large family of sons and swore them to the relentless pursuit of those two villains. He regarded them as utter filth and considered that the world would be tainted until their last descendant was dead. So were all of Diego's sons trained to believe, and they carried out their training in action, fulfilling their oath to the letter.

"Men, women and children have ridden that wheel, Senor Preece, and their mummies or their bones pave the bottom of this pool!"

"How long since it has last been used?" said Preece thickly, getting up from his seat.

"I should say about thirty years. My father thought he had accounted for the very last descendant, but we afterward learned that there was a son, Senor Perez!"

"You devil!" the American howled, and sprang at the smaller man, but Bohorquia had been expecting the move. There was a flash of metal and as the big man's nerves tensed for the shock of the bullet into his flesh, a spray of sweet, pleasantly perfumed liquid wet his face.

He gasped, fell forward and lay without a movement. His dulling ears heard Bohorquia say faintly, from an immeasurable distance: "And you are the man who meant to cheat me out of my oil lands! I wonder if you are a man or just a rabbit."

2

A HOLLOW INHUMAN VOICE boomed out one mighty and terrifying cry, and the single word it uttered was tossed about by the echoes of the cavern. *"Justice!"*

Preece opened his eyes. The glaring lights shone down upon him as before, but his position had changed. He lay flat upon his

back, staring up at the stalactite-studded cavern roof. About his chest and legs were ropes, but they were not tight and his hands were free to unfasten the knots which had, conveniently for him, been tied in front, within easy reach. He thought with contempt of whoever had bound him so carelessly and began to pick at the knots.

He noticed that his back ached, but did not realize at first that he lay upon a gently curving couch, until a change in the light upon the ropes which he worked upon caused him to look up.

The cavern roof was moving! No! By all that was holy, it was he that moved!

Slowly, relentlessly as the finger of Fate, he was descending, feet first, toward the floor of the cavern. Now, as he strained his neck, working frantically at his bonds while he peered between his feet, the distant cavern wall became visible through a thick blue haze.

And following down it toward the source of that haze, he saw that the floor of the cavern was no longer brown, but black and violent with motion. Great bubbles, a foot or more across, rose, burst with a plop and spatter of inky particles like the sudden commotion of cooking porridge, while into this hell-broth he was descending.

His efforts became frantic, but one recalcitrant knot proved more than his clumsy fingers could master.

Now, directly beneath his feet, he saw the boiling pitch circling in slow and greedy eddies, while supported only by the ropes he hung perpendicularly above the gurgitating mess. He recalled that the under rim of the wheel was not more than a few inches above the surface of the semi-fluid and the memory gave him strength. If he did not win free, he would be dragged under and die horribly in the clinging streamers of a robe as painful as Dejanira's shirt and even more adhesive.

It seemed then that he had the strength of a titan. Reaching a hand behind him, he felt something like the rung of a ladder and took a firm grip of it. Turning in the circle of his bonds, he faced the rim of the wheel and saw now that it was indeed fitted with

rungs, not situated flush against the two-foot-wide rim, but fixed about two inches away to afford an easy grip.

His seeking feet settled firm against a lower rung, and as he arched his back like an angry cat, the last rope snapped, not a second too soon. Already he was on the lowest arc of the circle permissible to him, unless he was actually to be dipped into the resinous pool, while upon the instant when the strained fibers parted, the speed of the turning wheel increased, as though malevolently directed; so that he found it a bitter struggle to climb up against the direction of the wheel's rotation. As he strove to maintain his place upon the circumference of this mighty engine of torture, he felt that he was in much the same position as the running squirrel within his wire cage, who, bound as he may and run with all his might, finds himself in the selfsame spot at the end of his struggles for freedom as when his mad chase commenced.

But there was a terrible difference; the squirrel might rest and try again, though his first situation could not be bettered, but sweating Preece, half suffocating in the pungent smoke, knew that the rest he so ardently desired, though taken but for a single second where he now was climbing, would end in slow and agonizing torment and in death.

His only hope was to continue climbing upward, ever upward, until he rounded the overhanging bulge of the wheel and could perhaps reach the top, where, if he were fortunate, he might get to his feet and walk till he dropped or until Bohorquia experienced a change of heart and relented.

The whole experience that he was undergoing was mad! It was impossible, yet he knew if he hesitated the seething pitch below would speedily convince him of its reality. From where he hung, Bohorquia, if he was present, was hidden from him; but hoping desperately for some action of mercy, if nothing more at present than a slight diminution of the wheel's spinning, he cried out in a strangled voice, interjected with coughs as the acrid smoke struck deep into the membranes of his lungs. He begged for mercy, threatened, made wild promises of wealth, and pleaded again; but finding that neither cajolings nor menacing words brought out an

answer, he fell despondently silent as he continued to climb at his greatest speed, finally concluding that Bohorquia had left him to his fate.

Just then came his answer, the only one he was ever to receive and one that issued from no familiar throat.

Calm,impassive, unhuman, setting the echoes flying in the grim cavern, came again that awful hollow voice that had ushered him back into consciousness, crying in a voice of brass the one word, *"Justice!"*

Scrabbling with ferocity at the rungs which slipped so swiftly past, he passed the overhang and gained his way little by little toward the top, where he might find relief. Now that the weight of his body did not hang so heavily upon his arms, but was supported in a measure by the rim beneath him, progress was easier and although the speed slightly increased, it was not enough to hold him back, and with exultation in his heart and a surge of returning confidence in his own powers, after some ten minutes of strenuous climbing he was able to stand erect.

Self-satisfaction thrilled him and he looked around with something of the old arrogance. The first peril had been met, overcome and was behind him. Surely he could cope with anything that was to follow!

Twenty feet away, looking along the drive-shaft between the flashing sword blades, he saw Bohorquia watching him without the slightest expression, either of malice or pity. Like an impersonal judge he sat, watching the carrying out of a sentence fixed long ago over which he had no control or interest.

Preece strode upon his treadmill way, revolving plans within his mind and discarding one after the other. If he leapt to the best of his ability, he could not reach the stone rim. If he fell short he would land in pitch four feet deep and would slowly roast, though had this depth been uniform to the pool's rocky shore, it would have been worth the trial, for a strong man might conceivably stand the torture long enough to fight his way to safety. Ah! The thought was vain, for the scheme had been well planned. Ten feet from the wheel, the bubbling pitch was seven feet deep, impassable to the strongest and most iron-nerved man,

and not unwillingly Preece gave up the thought. The venture would have been too desperate.

If again, the sword blades were not there, or even so, were not so closely set, a nimble man such as Preece knew himself to be might run out at least half the distance before he was obliged to leap or fall.

Pause now; consider, *which* way should he leap *if* the opportunity should come?

Bohorquia had said that a stone block, six feet high and four feet at the sides, was situated directly in front of one of the two chairs identically alike at either end of the drive-shaft. That would mean that one foot below the boiling pitch, a foothold the size of a small table was ready for him. He would sink to his knees, at best, but if he touched it at all he would be safe; then let Bohorquia look to himself!

Come! There was hope! His clever brain might scheme himself free with such a chance. Now to the main problem; before *which* stone chair lay the block?

He strode his narrow endless path, frowning, studying deep into the intricacies of that long-dead mind which had conceived the plan that might yet bring him to death. What would he have done?

Then suddenly he had the clue fast and he swore with jubilant feeling. Of course! There was only one set of levers to direct the movements of the wheel! The man in charge must perforce remain in that seat to manage the machinery. Now Preece thought swiftly and with method. The torturer would *not* place the block in front of his own seat, because he would assume that the man upon the wheel would be frantic to reach him, and would wish to see him sinking helplessly to doom; ergo, the block would be upon the opposite side of the pool in front of the other seat and the victim should leap the other way for safety.

His eyes narrowed; *that* reasoning was rudimentary, the simplest brain would arrive at that conclusion and act upon it, therefore the first Bohorquia must have expected his victims to reason that far and fail, so he *would,* after all, have placed the block before the torturer's seat.

The idea did not come to Preece, that there might be no block anywhere in the pool. He went on revolving his thought and looking at it from different angles; it was logical: could he support it further? Yes! The torturer would place the block there so that he would be able to push the victim back into the pitch! That too was only to be expected.

Preece did not doubt that eventually a chance would come for a leap, and he determined to be ready and watchful of opportunity.

He began to breathe easier as he walked along; if he could keep his balance and not lose his head, this gait would be safe for a long time. He estimated it to be about two miles an hour, and knowing himself for a doughty hiker, he cried out with sarcasm: "Keep it up, old boy, this is just nice exercise for me. If I only had some cigarettes this would be fun!"

The unyielding figure in the directing seat said nothing, but a sardonic chuckle was lost among the pop and snap of the bursting black domes in the pool. Mephistopheles might smile in just such a manner as did Bohorquia then. He reached for a lever with a red handle and Preece felt his heart pound with dreadful expectation of the unknown. He threw it over with a clang that rang dismally in the cavern.

At that second, Preece felt himself flying through the air, the black bubbles leaped up to meet him and he closed his eyes and shrieked as with arms wide flung, he dived headlong toward the gyrating eddies below!

A sharp shock and a shooting pain in his left ankle brought his eyes open again. He was hanging head down in the smoke, and even as he twisted and caught a rung, his foot came loose from his hold and the strain came sharply upon his arms. He saw then what had saved him for the moment.

The shoes he wore were heavy and thick-soled, with large bulging toe-caps that were very stiff. This had caught beneath one of the rungs and held him long enough to save his life, when he pitched helplessly forward, but he had not the time to give thanks just then, for once more the wheel was turning, this time in the opposite direction. The next few moments were crowded

ones, but eventually he found himself upon the top and walking easily again, though this time with a dull ache in his ankle and foot. He was not now so certain that he would have a chance to leap for the rim.

Eight hours later, he was still walking with a measured stride, lifting his feet mechanically over the rungs. The ache was like a jagged wire bound hot around his ankle; otherwise there was no change. Bohorquia still sat motionless as a carven man, betraying no signs of life except for the feverish glitter in his restlessly roving eyes, and the occasional movement when a lever was moved.

Preece had learned several things in the last few hours. He had learned that besides the red handle which stopped the wheel, which now he gave his closest attention and had been saved thereby from several other very narrow escapes, a handle that was blue speeded up the wheel and a lever painted yellow slowed it down again. There was a white one that reversed the action and a black one that so far had not been touched, and this was worrying him a great deal as he speculated concerning its purpose.

He had learned also that the voice sternly crying out *"Justice!"* came from a large trumpet high on the wall and was evidently some phonograph attachment which would continue to sound while the shaft turned. Every quarter of an hour the ominous word pealed out, until Preece had now come to realize that this was by far the worst part of his torment. As the time grew near for the trumpet to speak its two syllables, every nerve seemed to grow tense and tingle with horror as though his whole body was expecting a blow. After the echoes had let the word drop, he felt happy; but this sensation was short-lived and soon he was again straining his ears, almost dreading to miss the sound, yet fearing with all his soul that it would come too soon.

He had been hungry and thirsty, but those sensations had passed long ago. Dizziness had come upon him many times, while everything reeled in wild circles, but the pain in his ankle had driven it away. Sleep had found him once and he woke with a

start, still methodically walking, lifting his feet over the rungs, and perilously near the edge of the wheel.

When his eyelids had snapped open, he had caught Bohorquia with his hand upon the lever with the black handle, which he had released at once.

This startled Preece immensely and he cried out violently, "This is cold-blooded murder! Is there no particle of humanity in you?"

Bohorquia's teeth showed in a thinlipped smile of negation. "Not murder. No! This is the final act in a long plan of extermination. Is it murder to kill a rat? Your breed is even more unfit to live!"

He would not answer again to any of Preece's objurgations, and presently he increased the speed to its usual rate of two miles an hour.

Preece had not forgotten, and now after some deduction he believed he knew what the black-handled lever was for. In pursuance of a well-balanced plan, he closed his eyes nearly shut. He could still see through his eyelashes, but he knew that to the man in the chair it would seem as though he slept again.

Surreptitiously watching, he saw Bohorquia's hand slip out and grip the black handle.

The lever snicked silently into place and for a moment Preece detected no difference in his steady stride. Then it came to him that an accustomed sound was missing. The shaft no longer turned, the keen sword blades emitted no sparkling flashes as they swung through their circle, and though the wheel still rotated, the growl of meshing cogs had stopped.

By some lever system running under the pitch and up to the hub of the wheel, Bohorquia had disconnected the power and the wheel was spinning free! Here was a sudden and most alarming danger; unless he could decrease his pace at once, the wheel would turn faster and faster, driving him to increased efforts to hold his place, while his very struggles would add to the rate of turning, until it would spin too fast for him and inevitably hurl him into the smoking currents of resinous lava below.

He could not suppress a chuckle, for this was what he had

suspected. Bohorquia, thinking that he dozed, had flung the wheel out of gear, expecting that he would continue to walk unconsciously, until he had passed the exact center of the wheel's upper rim. Then upon waking, Preece would have found himself upon one of the two downward slopes; his frantic effort to get back would have turned the wheel faster and faster and he would have remained in the same place until he was flung off.

But he had miscalculated! Preece was not asleep! And now, Preece put his plan into effect. Quick as a flash, he dropped over the side of the wheel, wrapped his arms and legs around a spoke fifteen feet long and a second later found himself straddling the drive-shaft as he released the spoke.

Bohorquia was upon his feet now, shouting crazily, and Preece's smile was grim, for he saw that his tormenter touched first the blue handle and then the yellow but dared fling neither into place.

Preece knew well the thoughts that raced through the other man's mind. If he shifted gears now, the racing wheel would strip the cogs clean of the shaft and that might be followed by a

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broken shaft, a burst wheel, either of which results might well entangle Bohorquia in the deadly tangle of wreckage, though it would infallibly dispose of his victim.

So Preece, confident of a little while to steady himself, took his time in standing erect upon the shaft.

Bohorquia had called the shaft slippery, but it was not. Rust had gnawed it through the years, and as Preece had burst his shoe-laces with his strong thumbs and removed his shoes, he now trod its surface with ease.

He reached the rimless wheel of swords and steadied himself by one while he stepped between them. At that instant he saw Bohorquia's hand touch the yellow handle, and without conscious volition pulled upon the blade. Where it joined the shaft, the sword was red and pitted and at that point it now snapped. Preece's feet slipped from under him, but he caught the shaft as he fell across it, and while he hung precariously there, he poised the sharp-pointed blade like a javelin and darted it at Bohorquia little more than twenty feet away.

It sped true and with great force, catching him in the throat. He staggered and fell across the stone chair, clawing at the blade that pierced him through.

Preece with a thumping heart again managed to sit upon the shaft, and straddling it, he drew himself forward by jerks toward the point where the shaft came through the wall and where he would be able to drop upon the stone rim beside the governing levers.

He was still ten feet away, when Bohorquia, though dying, threw himself against the blue lever. The grinding gears crashed as the shaft commenced to turn and the cogs meshed with the still rapidly spinning wheel; but Preece, feeling the shiver run through the shaft when the mechanism connected it with the power outside, brought his feet up, found a support for them and sprang.

He fell short and yelled with agony, when his shoeless feet struck the seething pitch, but they did not penetrate far and he found himself directly in front of the stone chair.

He had landed upon the stone block! He was safe! He yelled in triumph, and then as he bent his knee to climb upon the rim, the dying body above lunged forward and fell upon him. In an embrace never to be broken they tottered on the brink of the hidden stone block. Preece fought for a foothold and found nothing. Together they slowly sank into the depths of the boiling pitch.

The last scene which came to their bursting eyes, before the implacable tide of agony lapped about their throats, was the sight of the huge wheel, ponderously revolving, recking naught of human passions or of an ancient oath's fulfilment.

Creaking as it slowly spun, the wheel went upon its lonely round, as unaffected by the double tragedy as that stern Fate of which it was the symbol, turning now with the same placid sureness that would mark its progress onward through the slow years, until its strong fabric should rot away or the stream run dry.

The distorted faces went under. One huge bloody bubble rose and burst, just as the metal throat of the phonograph boomed forth once more its only word, in a tone like a funeral bell tolling them into infinity: *"Justice!"*

Inquisitions

TALES OF THE
CTHULHU MYTHOS
by H. P. Lovecraft
and Others

Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583; 1969; 407 pp including introduction by August Derleth and Biographical Notes; jacket by Lee Brown Coye; $7.50.

For extended discussion and comment, see *The Editor's Page;* the volume is well printed in the usual handsome Arkham House format.

THE FOLSOM FLINT
and other curious tales
by David H. Keller

Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583; 1969; 213 pp; $5.00.

Contents of this collection are: *In Memoriam: David H. Keller,* by Paul Spencer; *Unto Us a Child is Born; The Golden Key; The Question; The Red Death; The White City; The Pent House; Air Lines; Chasm of Monsters; Dust in the House; The Landslide; The Folsom Flint; The Twins; Sarah; Fingers in the Sky; The Thing in the Cellar; A Piece of Linoleum; The Dead Woman.*

Eight of these stories are new to me, and three of these eight will be new to everyone except friends of the author who may have visited him and had a chance to read them in manuscript. This, and the excellent introduction by Paul Spencer, makes the volume worth having, if you are a Keller fan.

If you are not – well, my feeling is that there is enough first class material here to make a purchase worth while, but I must warn you that some of the stories are not representative of Keller at his best. *Unto Us a Child is Born* and *The Pent House* both seemed wonderful to me when I read them for the first time, back in 1933 and 1932 respectively. Re-reading them, the first tale seems unduly sentimental and the second simply unbelievable. *Air Lines* (1930), *The White City* (1935), *Dust in the House* (1938) and *The Red Death* (1941), stand up somewhat better, particularly the weird tale. Of the stories new to me, *Chasm of Monsters* I find powerful, *Sarah* amusing, and *Fingers in the Sky* nearly as fine as the masterly trio that ends the volume. Since *The Thing in the Cellar, A Piece of Linoleum,* and *The Dead Woman* are all short-short stories, they do not take up too many pages; they can no longer be obtained elsewhere, as the earlier collection, *Tales From Underwood* is now out of print, so it was a good idea to resurrect them here. I regret, however, that the present collection is so distinctly below the level of the earlier one. RAWL.

(turn page)

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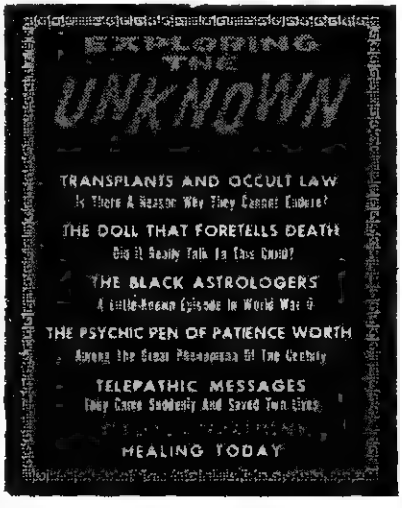

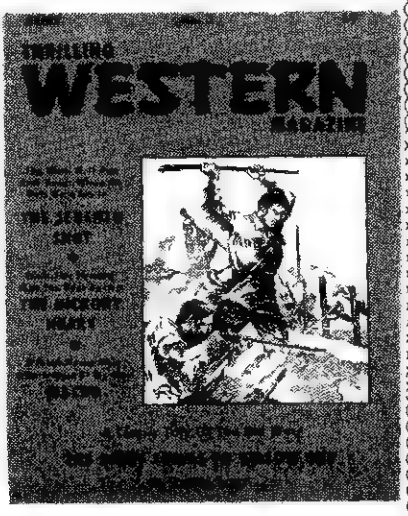

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PUBLICATIONS

RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY, Leland Sapiro, Box 40 University Station, Regina, Canada; 60c per issue; $2.00 per year.

Volume 4, Number 2 (January 1970) is the latest issue to hand of this excellent journal of thoughtful criticism of science fiction and fantasy, which features *Challenge and Response*· Paul Anderson's View of Man, by Sandra Miesal; *Homo Hydrogensis.* Notes on J. G. Ballard, by Nick Perry & Roy Wilkie; *Out of Time's Abyss:* The Martian Stories of ERB, by Richard Kyle; *Cassilda in Tasagoroth*, an exchange between Editor Sapiro and myself over Robert W. Chambers' *Cassilda's Song* and a possible imitation, entitled *Tsagoroth*, by Frederick John Walsen; and *Andre Norton: Why Has She Been Neglected*?, by Barray McGhan, plus the usual interesting letters department, departments by Harry Warner and Jim Harmon, and poetry which I can live happily without. (For my taste, the number of poems in fantasy and science fiction amateur publications, over a period of a couple decades, that are worth reading, will not exhaust the counting abilities of a three-year old who is not awfully retarded.) Aside from Richard Kyle, none of the authors of the featured articles are known to me from previous work, but all present worthwhile material, particularly Miesal and Kyle. *Recommended.*

(turn to page 122)

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SPECULATION, Peter R. Weston, 31 Pinewall Avenue, Kings Norton, Birmingham 30, England; 35c per copy; 3 for $1.00. The publisher requests overseas customers to remit cash – not checks; this is because British banks take a whopping slice out of overseas checks they process, and this can hurt when the amount is small to begin with.

Volume 2, Number 12, Issue No. 24 (September/October 1969) is the latest I have seen, and is devoted almost entirely to a symposium: *Heinlein: After 30 Years*. Weston had hoped to have this issue out last July, so that it would be read exactly thirty years after the appearance of RAH's first story, *Life-Line*, which ran in the August 1939 issue of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION*. Well, he didn't quite make it, but the realization of his aims in the symposium makes this issue one worth obtaining.

You'll find a true spectrum of opinion about and response to Heinlein here, ranging from the venomous to the adulatory, all have something to say, even the most subjective ones, for they represent typical sorts of response to the sort of stimulus Heinlein produces. And some are genuinely thoughtful. Since I myself am in this group picture, I won't comment upon any individual portrait, except to say that I found the work entirely interesting and thought-provoking. An excellent issue of the leading British fan magazine, which makes an excellent contemporary-centered foil to the more past-centered *RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY* commented upon above. *Recommended.*

S F COMMENTARY, Bruce R. Gillespie, P.O. Box 30, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, 3340, Australia, 40 cents per issue, $3.00 for 9.

This is the successor to John Bangsund's lamented *AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW*; and while it does not either top or equal *SPECULATION*, noted above, it is nonetheless in the same league with Weston's publication. The latest issue I have is Number 3, 1969 (whole No. 3) and is mostly a report upon the 1968 Melbourne Science Fiction Conference; it carries Guest-of-Honor Jack Wodham's address and The Discussion Panel, indicating that Australian science-fictionists are decidedly up with the times, and definitely have something of their unique own to contribute, even though the range of attitudes and tones does not differ from that found in the British Isles or the United States of America. Worth trying if you find the Weston magazine to your taste.

LOCUS, Charlie Brown, 2078 Anthony Avenue, Bronx, New York 10457; published more-or-less fortnightly, 5/$1.00; 10/$2.00, 20/$4.00 in North America.

This news magazine, running generally eight pages per issue, plus fliers and occasional bonuses such as Anthony Lewis's interesting and excellent report upon the professional publications (including the one you are now reading), complements rather than substitutes for Anne Dietz's printed *LUNA MONTHLY*. *LOCUS* is neatly mimeographed; and since its range is very broad, almost any issue is likely to have items dealing with matters in which you or I may have little or no interest – but there's almost sure to be something about matters that *do* interest us, and the odds are that it will be material which we would have missed otherwise. The 46th issue just reached me as this was being prepared; I expect that the fifth decade of *LOCI* will be coming out by the time you read this comment. ***Recommended.***

Coming Next Issue

"Nothing is any use," the jailer gasped. "We sprinkled holy water over her, and the priest pronounced the exorcism, but it was no use at all."

"Of course not," said the doctor. "Don't blame the priest for that, though. All truth is relative in that world that Radovitch is now an inhabitant of. Had he ever had it knocked into his hard head that the devil flies from holy water, no doubt a single drop would have sent him howling into limbo, but as he doesn't know what it means, you can hardly consider him impolite to stay. But take us to the patient."

At the same instant, the crash of breaking furniture resounded through the house, intermingled with strange, gutteral interjections. The jailer led the way hastily to a room at the end of a long corridor; the doctor and I followed him. Upon the floor, partly freed from the ropes with which she had been bound, was the child, struggling to release herself from the chair she had overturned, whose broken pieces seemed to have been subjected to the physical strength of a powerful athlete. Her face was distorted with rage, and low, unintelligible sounds came from her lips. Though violently inclined, she seemed restrained by some lethargy from active violence, and she glanced around at us, not recognizing anyone. As the doctor and her father caught her to readjust the bonds, she struck at them viciously. It needed our united strength to hold her, while the doctor injected a few doses of morphine into her arm.

But what will haunt me to the last day of my life was the girl's face. No longer that of a young child, it presented rather the aspect of a man's -- a man who had spent years in evil living and thinking. The glazed eyes, the puffy skin, bespoke a life of debauchery; while over the coarsened features were stamped the imprints of the most devilish passions that ever ruled over the flesh. And in an instant I perceived, ridiculously implanted upon the little face, the stamp of the Russian murderer.

"When did this begin?" asked Brodsky, holding the girl tightly. . . .

"The day after his death," the jailer answered. "She could not be awakened easily the next morning. She seemed stupid and sleepy and complained of evil dreams. Then she tried to get into the cell which he had occupied, and when we prevented her she became sullen and angry. She did not seem to recognize us at all, and she began to mutter in an outlandish speech that none of us could understand. Then she would fall asleep for a moment and wake up herself again. She kept sleeping and waking, and each time she was different."

You won't want to miss this utterly bizarre and unusual tale.

THE CASE OF THE JAILER'S DAUGHTER

by Victor Rousseau

The Star Chamber

Those of you who read Anne Dietz's excellent monthly news-publication, *LUNA MONTHLY* noted an account of the difficulties we underwent in 1969 in their November issue. For the benefit of others: the first issue of *WEIRD TERROR TALES* was planned to appear early in September, but due to difficulties with printers, involving a change of printers (the new ones took over the actual running off of the issues lying around, which had been set up and prepared for filming by our former typesetter), our Winter issue did not appear until mid-December; and as this is written, the second issue is not yet on sale. Thus we shall have to confine material here to the Winter number.

Gegory D. Akers writes from Costa Mesa, California: "Belated Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and congratulations on your new magazine, *WEIRD TERROR TALES.* I'll subscribe as soon as subscriptions are available.

"The first issue had two outstanding stories: *The Dead-Alive,* which seems to be more at home in SMS, and *The Whispering Thing,* one of the few real terror tales I've ever come across. Ranking first is the almost terror-tale, *The House and the Brain,* followed by the non-terror tale, *The Beast of Averoigne* and *Dead Legs.* Trailing the others are *He* and *Ms. Found in a Bottle.* (I have never developed a taste for either Lovecraft, who is generally complicated, or Poe, who is generally just boring. These two stories seem superior to most of their other work.)"

Interestingly enough, a considerable percentage of the minority which does not like the tales of H. P. Lovecraft also finds Poe boring.

Justine Voorhees writes from Irvington, New Jersey: "I was only born in 1948, but I've been reading these stories since I could read and feel I know something about them.

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"Why does every terror-horror magazine insist on resurrecting Poe? The master is as good, it's true, today as he was twenty or fifty years ago, but I'm sure every connoisseur of frightening tales has read all his works, or most of them. Not everyone knows all of Lovecraft, though, or Lord Dunsany, or Margaret Irwin—we need more little-known stories by such people!"

I cannot answer for other magazines, but can say that while I agree with you that the true connoisseur of weird fiction has indeed read Poe (or most of him), a very large percentage of those who buy any given issue are not connoisseurs! They're relative newcomers to the field, or perhaps really brand-new newcomers. The odds are that they may never have read any stories by Edgar Allan Poe before (although they may have seen films of Poe stories—if you want to so label the atrocities that the movies have perpetrated along these lines; or "read" comic book versions of the stories) or may not have read any particular one. *Ms. Found in a Bottle* is not one of the most widely reprinted of the tales, yet is among the best. And it seemed to me that a comparison between EAP and one of his star pupils, H. P. Lovecraft, might be interesting: not a comparison in an essay, but a working comparison shown simply by presenting a good story by each of the two, one after the other, in the same issue. But this is not something I plan to do frequently, although I do want to present a similar comparison between EAP and another of his star pupils: Clark Ashton Smith, later on.

I'd love to present "little-known stories" by Lord Dunsany (whom I admire greatly) and Maragret Irwin, but, alas neither of these authors is presently available to me.

(turn to page 128)

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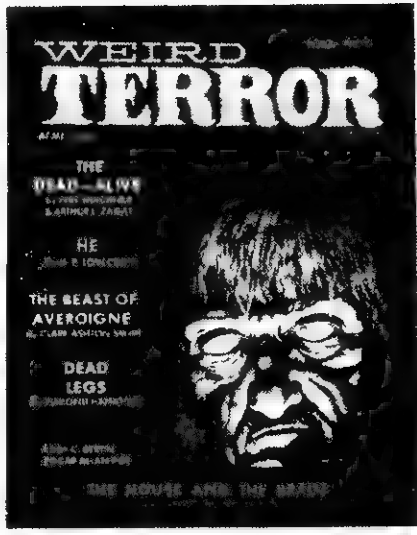

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David Charles Paskow writes: "I am very happy to see a new addition to your demoniacal duo of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES.* May *WEIRD TERROR TALES* create a relatively permanent trio.

"It was a well balanced first issue, well balanced that is between the classic horror/terror of Poe and Bulwer-Lytton and the 'contemporary' terror of Lovecraft and Hamilton. (I am curious as to why you chose to include *The House and the Brain.* Yes, it *is* a classic, but it also appears in what is considered by many to be a *must* collection for fans of the Genre, Wise & Frasers *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural.* . . . But, to answer my own question, I suppose the story could have been included to draw 'outsiders': those for whom *WEIRD TERROR TALES* would be an introduction.)

"Ratings for the premiere issue: (1) *The Dead-Alive;* (2) *He;* (3) *Dead Legs* tied with *The Beast of Averoigne;* (4) *The House and the Brain;* (5) *The Whispering Thing;* (6) *Mss. Found in a Bottle.* (O – Editorial)."

You've answered your question so well that I do not need to add anything. My thanks to the many readers who had kind words for the editorial – but, please, if some of you think they bear a less pleasing aroma, hesitate not to tell me so plainly.

Richard M. Hodgens writes from Glen Ridge, New Jersey:

"It was very good to see WTT No. 1.

"And I found that all four of its short stories are very good indeed, though the three longer stories are . . . not. Smith's story, and Poe's, are not merely very good, of course, but outstanding, or more than outstanding. *The Beast of Averoigne* seems to be perfect, and the only thing wrong with *Ms. Found in a Bottle* is that it's a bit too much of the New Thing, you know. . . . (I think I must have read it many years ago, but it seemed new to me.) Eddy C. Bertin did better than H. P. Lovecraft, this time: *The Whispering Thing* is symmetrical and chilling, while *He* is much too personal and comes apart – any chill raised by *He* dissipated by a gang of other ghosts, or whatever they may be. . . . The trouble with the Greenwich section of New York City is not ghosts. In fact, the trouble with the whole city is so terribly different that the story is too dated to have anything like its intended effect - for the present, anyway. It has good things in it, and it is always interesting, though. HPL's love for the past was pretty ambivalant and this is quite clear, and very telling, in *He.* It isn't merely a personal thing, either – as is his distaste for NYC. The man knew, and knew how to show, what accepting or embracing a tradition, a culture, or a time is likely to involve. . . . I can not explain what I mean here. But I like it in *He.* I do not like the premise hidden – till the last line – in Clark Ashton Smith's *The Beast of Averoigne.* But "The Beast" is much, much better than *He.*

"The longer stories – by Bulwer-Lytton, Hamilton, Schachner & Zagat – seem to be of a different type, or types – though I could not say what the differences are. . . . But I do not think that is why I happen to dislike them. . . . Like any other reader, I think I dislike them because they are bad. *The House and the Brain* is not bad enough for an 'X' though. Maybe these stories seem so bad because of the contrast with the work of Smith and Poe, Bertin and HPL. At any rate, they are not so bad enough to diminish my appreciation of WTT No. 1. . . .

"The Finlay drawing on the cover is great, of course."

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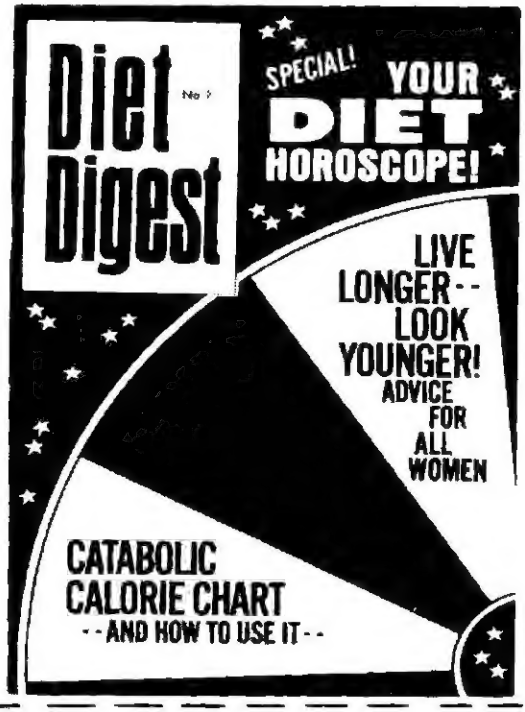

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